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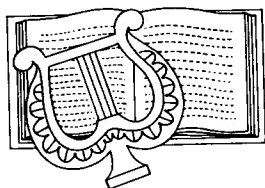
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THE
SPANISH MATCH;

OR,

CHARLES STUART AT MADRID.

BY
WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH,

AUTHOR OF

"THE TOWER OF LONDON," "LEAGUER OF LATHOM,"
"CARDINAL POLE," ETC.

Carlos Estuardo soy,
Que, siendo amor mi guia,
Al cielo de Espana voy
Por ver my estrella Maria.
LOPE DE VEGA.

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THE SPANISH MATCH.



BOOK I.—THE JOURNEY OF JACK AND TOM SMITH TO MADRID.

I.

BY WHOM THE JOURNEY TO MADRID WAS PROJECTED; AND HOW
IT WAS PROPOSED TO THE KING.

ON Monday, the 17th of February, in the year 1623, King James I. was alone in his private cabinet in the palace of Whitehall, engaged in perusing a despatch, which he had just received from the Earl of Bristol, then ambassador-extraordinary to the court of Madrid.

With the appearance of the monarch the reader must be familiar, so it is scarcely necessary to describe him, but we may mention, that on this occasion, as on most others, he was cased in a black silk doublet, so thickly padded as to be proof against stroke of sword or dagger. This bolstered doublet gave him an air of excessive and unnatural corpulency, though in reality his frame was very meagre, as was shown by his legs, while his huge bombasted trunk-hose greatly impeded his movements and increased the natural ungainliness of his figure. There were more marks of age and decrepitude about James than were warranted by his years—he was then only fifty-seven—his cheeks were hollow, his eyes bleary, his limbs shrunken, and he tottered in his gait like a

feeble old man. His whole appearance, indeed, betokened that he was well-nigh worn out, and such was the opinion entertained of him by the courtiers, who, feeling assured he could not last long, had already begun to pay their devotions to the rising sun.

The intelligence conveyed to the king was evidently far from agreeable to him. Not only did he manifest considerable irritation, as by the aid of a powerful pair of glasses he got through the despatch, but at last he threw it down with an oath—the British Solomon, as is well known, swore lustily when angered—and exclaimed, “By my saul! I will no longer be trifled with. The King of Spain is playing me false. I will break off the marriage-treaty at once, and recal Bristol.” He then seized a pen, and adjusting his spectacles, began to indite a letter to the ambassador, in which he gave full vent to his displeasure, by no means mincing his phrases, but setting down whatever came uppermost.

While he was thus occupied, the door was opened, and two persons entered the cabinet. As they were unannounced by the gentleman-usher, James, among whose many infirmities deafness was numbered, did not hear them come in, and his back being towards the door, he did not remark their presence. So he continued his task, under the impression that he was alone, concocting his sentences aloud, and thus acquainting those near him with the secrets of his despatch, as well as diverting them by the coarse energy of his expressions. The foremost of the two would have interrupted him, but was checked by his companion, who whispered in his ear, “Let him alone. He will never send off that despatch.”

The individual to whom these words were addressed, was a young man about two-and-twenty, whose noble lineaments and dignified deportment proclaimed him of the highest rank. In fact, he looked infinitely more like a king than the old monarch near whom he stood. His features were characterised by a gravity far beyond his years, and a shade of melancholy sat upon his brow, heightening the interest inspired by his handsome and

thoughtful countenance. His eyes were large and black, his forehead lofty and capacious, denoting the possession of a powerful intellect, while his looks breathed taste and refinement. Moustaches and a pointed beard harmonised well with his somewhat lengthy visage, and his dark locks, divided above the temples, fell down in ringlets upon the starched lace ruff encircling his throat, and which served as a frame to his comely head—a head, once seen, never to be forgotten. His complexion was pale, inclining to swarthinness—a hue of skin supposed to belong to one of saturnine temperament. He was about the middle height, but held himself so erect that he seemed taller than he was in reality. His figure was slender, but perfectly proportioned, and his demeanour, as we have intimated, full of grace and majesty. His habiliments were of white velvet, and became him well, the doublet and hose being puffed with azure silk, and the mantle lined with the same stuff. His sole ornament was the diamond star upon his cloak.

In this striking-looking personage there will be little difficulty, we apprehend, in recognising Charles, Prince of Wales.

The prince's companion was likewise very handsome—handsomer, indeed, than the prince—but he lacked the dignity of manner and singularly high-bred look that distinguished Charles. He was in the prime of manhood, being the prince's senior by about eight or nine years, and possessed a figure of unequalled symmetry. Well-favoured, however, as he was in form and feature, his haughty manner marred the effect of his good looks. His magnificent person needed no embellishment, yet his attire was splendid, his pink satin doublet and hose being covered with gems, while chains of large orient pearls hung from his neck down to his very girdle, which was likewise encrusted with precious stones. To the extraordinary personal advantages we have described, George Villiers, Marquis of Buckingham—for he it was—added great accomplishments, mental as well as bodily. Clear-sighted, keen-witted, eloquent, and if not learned or

profound, he had art enough to hide his deficiencies. He was expert in all manly exercises; rode better than any one at court, won all the prizes at the tilt-yard, and danced more gracefully than Sir Walter Raleigh.

Seven years ago, on his first appearance at court, where he was introduced as a rival to the then reigning favourite, Carr, Earl of Somerset, young Villiers's remarkable graces of person and captivating manner at once attracted the king's notice, and his rise was incredibly rapid. Favours were lavished upon him by the infatuated monarch; he was ennobled, and eventually raised to the highest posts in the state. To enumerate all the important offices with which he had been gratified by his doting master would be tedious, but it may be mentioned, in order to give an idea of his power and greatness at the period in question, that he was Lord High Admiral of England, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Constable of the Castle of Dover and of the royal Castle of Windsor, Lord President of the Council of War, Knight of the Garter, and first minister. Besides all these and many other posts and honours, he had a dukedom in expectancy.

Since his aggrandisement, however, Buckingham's character had materially changed. Affable at first to all, he had become excessively haughty and domineering, being insolent even to his royal master. Boundlessly profuse in expenditure, and insatiate, he well-nigh drained James's coffers. His entertainments were superb, surpassing in splendour those of the king. His retinue was that of a prince; his carriage was drawn by six horses, and if he rode forth a large escort attended him. No wonder that his insufferable arrogance and imperious deportment alienated his partisans and increased the number of his enemies—no wonder that his overthrow was frequently attempted. In vain. Buckingham proved too strong for his enemies. Favourite alike of father and son, of the king and the heir to the throne, he derided all opposition.

That Buckingham should have succeeded in ingra-

tiating himself with a prince so grave and reserved in manner as Charles, whose character was so opposite to his own, and who was so likely to be distrustful of his advances, shows wonderful adroitness on his part, and proves incontestably that he possessed in the highest degree the art of pleasing. In order, however, to confirm his influence with the prince, he conceived a bold and singular project, to explain which a brief retrospect will be necessary.

James had long cherished the design of forming a matrimonial alliance for his son with Spain, and had made a formal proposition to Philip III. for the hand of his second daughter, the Infanta Maria; but though the offer was graciously received, and negotiations entered into, innumerable delays occurred, and his patience being at length exhausted by the dilatory Spanish cabinet, James put an end to the treaty. But though baffled, and offended by the duplicity which he supposed had been practised towards him, James had not altogether abandoned his design, and other circumstances occurring at a later period to render an alliance with Spain more than ever desirable in his eyes, he determined to renew his offer to Philip IV., who had just succeeded his father. In this matrimonial scheme, Charles, the principal person concerned in it, entirely acquiesced. Though he had never beheld the Infanta, the ravishing description he had received of her charms inflamed his breast with the strongest passion.

Accordingly, John Digby, Earl of Bristol, a diplomatist of approved ability, and who stood deservedly high in James's favour, was despatched as ambassador-extraordinary to Madrid to propose the match to Philip IV. The young king seemed far more favourably inclined to the alliance than his father had been, and declared that if the religious difficulties in the way of the union could be adjusted, all other points might be easily settled. But these difficulties were not easily removed.

Months flew by—and the negotiation made little pro-

gress. As a preliminary measure, a dispensation had to be obtained from the Pope, Gregory XV., but this was refused unless the King of England engaged to mitigate the severe laws then in force against his Roman Catholic subjects. To this demand James assented, and began at once to carry his promise into effect. His ready compliance, however, induced the Pope to make further demands, and James was compelled to make additional concessions. Still the dispensation was delayed.

Things were in this state when the Conde de Gondomar, for many years ambassador to England, but who had recently returned to his own court, in order, if possible, to expedite the negotiation, wrote privately to Buckingham that he did not believe the match would ever take place, unless the prince came to Madrid to fetch his bride. "Bring him here," concluded Gondomar, "and the affair will be speedily settled."

The hint was not lost upon Buckingham. Persuaded that success would attend the proposed expedition, in which case the entire credit of accomplishing the union would attach to himself instead of to the Earl of Bristol, whom he hated as a rival, while the prince must needs feel grateful to him for procuring him a consort, Buckingham proposed the journey to Charles, assuring him that it was the only means of accomplishing the object he had in view, and offered to accompany him.

Fired by the romantic nature of the project, which exactly suited his character, Charles at once agreed to the proposition, thanked Buckingham for his zeal, and manifested the utmost impatience to set forth upon the journey.

The grand difficulty was to obtain the king's consent. His majesty was sure to raise numerous objections to the expedition, but these Buckingham undertook to remove. The prince's impatience would not brook delay, so, after arranging a plan of action, they entered the cabinet as described on the morning in question, resolved to carry their point.

They came at the very nick of time, since James, in his

present mood, might have broken the marriage-treaty, and so have effectually frustrated their design.

For a few minutes after their entrance, the king continued his despatch, reciting aloud what he was setting down. He then paused, and while he was reflecting, Charles, advancing towards his chair, made a reverence, and said, "When your majesty is at leisure I crave a word with you."

"Bide awee, Babie Charlie—bide awee!" exclaimed the king. "I'm engaged on yer ain business—that confounded alliance with Spain, which has given me more trouble than aught I ever undertook. But I'll make an end of it now. Ha! is that you, Steenie?" he added, noticing the favourite. "Saul o' my body, lads, I canna say that ye are either of you welcome to yer auld dad at this moment, for he has been sairly put out by a despatch just received from Bristol—fresh delays—new demands—enough to drive one stark mad. You maun gie up all thoughts of the Infanta, Babie Charlie, for she never can be yours. I am about to break off the match"

"Not so, sire—not so!" cried his son.

"But I say 'yea,'" vociferated James, testily. "Hear what I hae written to Bristol, and then ye'll understand whether I'm in earnest or no."

"Your majesty need not trouble yourself to read the despatch," remarked Buckingham. "We know what it contains. But in spite of all that has happened—in spite of the dissimulation and perfidy of Olivarez—in spite of Bristol's mismanagement—in spite of the Pope—the match *will* take place."

"Ye are wrang, Steenie—ye are wrang," cried James. "I tell ye, man, I am about to break it off."

"Would you undo your own work, just when it is on the eve of accomplishment?" said Buckingham. "You are far too sagacious for that."

"Uds death! man, there's nae help for it," returned James. "I will mak nae mair concessions to please the Pope or the great Dule himsel, wha eggs him on. I hae made ower mony already."

"I should be the last to counsel your majesty to truckle to Rome," said Buckingham. "But you may dispense with the dispensation. I will stake my head that the match shall take place—ay, and before the end of April."

"Ye are a bauld man, Steenie—a verra bauld man," said James, laughing, "and can do maist things weel, but ye canna perform impossibilities."

"I can do what Bristol has failed to do, at all events," rejoined Buckingham. "And this is no idle boast, as your majesty will find, if you put me to the test."

"Ye say that safely, for ye ken fu' weel that I am not likely sae to try ye," observed James. "But let me make an end of my despatch."

At a sign from Buckingham, Charles then drew nearer to his father, and said, in an earnest voice, "I have a matter of importance to lay before your majesty, on which I desire to have your advice. But, before proceeding, I must have your royal word that you will not divulge the secret I am about to impart to any one—not even to your council. Otherwise, my lips will remain sealed."

"I hae nae secrets, as ye ken, frae Steenie," replied James, whose curiosity was aroused. "But sin' he is present, and will hear the secret—if he be not acquainted wi' it already, as I shrewdly suspect—there is na need to make an exception in his favour. Speak without fear, my bairn. I solemnly pledge you my royal word that I will keep your secret as close as I ought to keep my purse."

"Since I am thus encouraged," said Charles, "I can no longer hesitate to prefer my request. Gracious sovereign and father," he continued, prostrating himself before him, "grant me, I beseech you, permission to travel to Madrid to fetch the Infanta, whom you have chosen for my consort, but who, I feel assured, never will be mine unless I can thus obtain her. Instead of quenching the passion I have conceived for this adorable princess, the difficulties which have occurred during the long-protracted negotiation for her hand, have increased it.

I shall never be happy without her, and indeed have vowed to take no other wife, so that, unless I win her, I shall be condemned to a life of celibacy, and your royal line will not be continued."

"Saints forfend!" cried James, uneasily.

"In proceeding in person to fetch my bride," pursued Charles, "I shall imitate the example of my chivalrous ancestor, James V. of Scotland, who, journeying into France in quest of a consort, was rewarded by the hand of the Princess Madeleine, sole daughter of François I. Moreover, I shall copy, as I am bound to do, my wise and honoured father, whose ardent nature prompted him to sail to Denmark to gain the princess on whom he had set his affections. As James V. succeeded, and as you succeeded, sire, so shall I."

"Ahem!" exclaimed James, coughing dryly. "Dinna be guided by bonnie Jamie, Babie Charlie—dinna be guided by me. The wisest of men sometimes err, and I gave nae great proof of sagacity in taking that step."

"You gave unquestionable proof of spirit and of devotion to the queen my mother, sire," returned Charles. "Whatever the motive that influenced you, I honour you for it. But vouchsafe an answer to my request. Have I your permission to travel to Madrid?"

"Ye hae ta'en me so much by surprise that I can make nae direct response," returned James, cautiously. "The matter requires great consideration. When do you desire to set out?"

"Without delay—to-morrow," replied Charles.

"To-morrow!" ejaculated the king. "By my hali-dame! ye must be daft to think of it. Why, it will tak a month to fit out a fleet to convey ye to Spain! Ask Steenie, who is Lord High Admiral, and he will explain to you the time it will take to get all ready."

"I need not ask the question, sire, since it is not my intention to go to Spain in that princely fashion. I design to travel by post, in disguise, as a simple gentleman, accompanied only by Buckingham, who has consented to go with me, and two or three attendants."

"Wha the deil has put this mad scheme into your head?" cried James, aghast. "Ride by post frae London to Madrid, like a courier! Is it befitting the heir to the throne of England to travel sae? Answer me that, Babie Charlie?" "Answer me that?"

"I shall travel incognito, sire, and shall not discover myself till I reach Madrid."

"Ye'll never reach Madrid if ye travel in that way, my puir bairn," said the king. "Hae ye reflectit on the perils of the journey? Grantin ye get safely through France, whilk I mich misdoubt, ye will hae to cross great barren plains and steep mountains infested by robbers, and may be set upon in some spot where there is nae chance of succour, and barbarously murdered, and then I shall lose my twa darling boys, Babie Charles and Steenie. Say nae mair aboot it—spare your breath—nae arguments will move me."

"I shall not arise till you grant my request, sire," returned Charles, maintaining his position. "I go like a paladin of old to win the sovereign mistress of my heart, and were the expedition unattended by danger, I would not undertake it."

"Why, ye are as moonstruck as Don Quixote himself!" cried James. "But dinna suppose yer auld dad will suffer ye to commit such folly. He loves his bairn too dearly. What say you, Steenie?" he added to Buckingham. "Surely ye canna be party to this hair-brained scheme?"

"If the prince travels to Madrid as he desires to do, I shall accompany him," returned Buckingham. "Your paternal anxiety magnifies the dangers of the journey. I warrant me you will laugh heartily at our adventures when we come back."

"If ye ever *do* come back, dear lads, I promise ye I shall laugh, and that right heartily," said James. "But something tells me if ye gang to Spain in this way, I shall never set eyes on ye mair. Why not tarry for the fleet? Besides, I darena consent without consulting the council, and they may prohibit my son's departure."

"Very likely they would, sire," observed Charles. "But you have pledged me your royal word not to mention the matter to any one without my consent; and I hold you strictly to the promise."

"Idiot that I was to bind myself sae!" cried the king. "But ye will gain naething by the stratagem—naething. I refuse my consent."

"Then the prince's death will lie at your door," rejoined Buckingham. "It will break his heart if he loses the Infanta—as he infallibly will, unless this expedient be adopted. Do I exaggerate, prince?—Speak!"

"Not in the least," replied Charles. "If I am thwarted, and robbed of my prize, I shall never survive the bitter disappointment."

"Was ever king sae sair beset?" groaned James. "I see plain enuch that ye are baith in a plot against me, but ye shallna prevail. I am firm in my refusal."

"Hear me before you decide, sire," said Charles. "As Heaven shall judge me, if I am denied the Infanta, I will take no other wife. Your majesty professes to desire the marriage——"

"Professes to desire it!" interrupted James. "I desire naething on earth sae mich. I wad gie half my kingdom. to accomplish it."

"Then let me go, and it is done," said Charles. "Hear me yet further, sire. Not only will my presence at Madrid bring the negotiation to an immediate and satisfactory issue, but it will ensure the restitution of his hereditary dominions to my brother-in-law, the Count Palatine. Philip IV. cannot refuse his aid to the Elector when I ask it."

"That wad, indeed, be a triumph gained, and wad gladden my heart, which is sair troubled in regard to my daughter Elizabeth," observed James. "I ought not to yield, for I hae mony misgivings as to the result of the expedition; but since ye are bent upon it, I will not hinder ye."

His point being thus gained, Charles sprang joyfully to his feet, and threw himself into his father's arms, who

tenderly embraced him, exclaiming, "Heaven bless ye, my bonnie bairn, and grant ye a prosperous journey!"

"Your majesty's decision has been wisely made, and you will never rue it," observed Buckingham. "And now, since the affair is settled, it may be well to discuss the arrangements of the journey. We would defer to your majesty's opinion in the choice of our attendants. Whom do you recommend?"

"I need not search far to find one," returned James. "There is your secretary, Sir Francis Cottington, Babie Charlie, whom we have just elevated to a baronetcy. He has been attached to our embassy at Madrid, and knows the court intimately. You canna do better than take him. Sir Francis is a trusty and discreet man, in whom I have every confidence."

"Your confidence is well bestowed, sire," returned the prince. "I had fixed upon Cottington as one of my attendants, provided my project met with your sanction. He is without, in the ante-chamber; but he knows nothing of the enterprise, for neither Buckingham nor myself have breathed a word of it to any one save your majesty."

"I will talk to him anon," observed the king. "Then there is your groom of the chamber, Endymion Porter, who has just returned frae Madrid. He speaks the language like a Spaniard, kens the people weel, and will be verra useful to you. Take him."

"Willingly—right willingly," returned Charles. "I had also thought of Endymion Porter. His perfect knowledge of the language, and familiarity with the manners of the people, will be a great help to us. As your majesty is aware, I speak Spanish indifferently well myself."

"And I very indifferently," remarked Buckingham. "But I make no doubt we shall get on well enough. Your majesty having assigned Cottington and Endymion Porter to the prince, I will crave permission to take as my own attendant my master of the horse, Sir Richard Graham."

"I approve your choice, Steenie," replied James. "Dick Græme is as handsome as Adonis, and his bra' looks and gallant bearing will charm the Spanish señoras. Like Babie Charlie, he may chance to find a wife in Madrid. But hault! there is one point which must not be forgotten. Does Dick speak Spanish?"

"Better than I do myself," returned Buckingham.

"That's na sayin' mich," laughed the king. "And now, lads, under what names do you mean to travel?"

"We have not thought of that," replied the prince. "Give us our designations, sire."

"The Palmerin de Inglaterra and Amadis de Gaula would suit ye best," said James, laughing; "but since these renowned names might prove inconvenient, I wad counsel you to adopt humbler appellations, and style yourselves the twa Smiths—Jock and Tam."

"Excellent!" cried Buckingham. "Your majesty has a rare humour. The prince shall be Jack Smith, and I will be Tom."

"I am quite content," remarked Charles. "As the Brothers Smith we will travel to Madrid."

"Will ye not send on a courier before you?" observed the king, pleased with their ready assent to his whim.

"That were to proclaim our secret to all the world," returned Charles. "None save our attendants must be made acquainted with our intended journey. There must be no avant courier to Paris or Madrid, or the project will be blown abroad and defeated. We must take Philip and Olivarez by surprise. On our arrival at Madrid, we will proceed at once to the English embassy."

"The hotel in which Bristol resides, and where you will find him, has an odd name," remarked James. "It is called *La Casa de las siete Chimeneas*, or, in plain English, 'The House of Seven Chimneys.' Though so scantily supplied with chimneys, I believe it is a large mansion, sae ye will be weel accommodated; and I trust ye will gar every chimney reek while ye stay there."

"We will take good care of ourselves, never fear, sire," said Buckingham. "I like the name of the house."

Seven is a lucky number. There are the Seven Sages of Greece—the Seven Champions—the Seven Stars—why not the Seven Chimneys?”

“One of the Pleiades has vanished,” remarked James. “Count the chimneys when ye get to Madrid, and let me know that all are standing, for if ane be wanting, I shall think that your errand will prove unsuccessful. Ye said just now that Sir Francis Cottington is in the ante-chamber. Bid him come in. As he is to attend you, I may talk the matter over with him, I suppose?”

“Most assuredly, sire,” replied Charles. “I should wish you to do so.”

“Call him in, Steenie—call him in,” said the king; “and if Endymion Porter and Dick Græme chance to be in the ante-chamber, let them come in at the same time.”

“All three were there when his highness and myself passed through,” returned Buckingham.

“Cottington will oppose the expedition,” he added, in a whisper, to Charles.

“He will not dare to do so when he finds I am bent upon it,” rejoined the prince, in the same tone.

“We shall see,” observed Buckingham, as he stepped towards the door to execute the king’s order.

II.

SHOWING WHO WERE CHOSEN AS JACK AND TOM SMITH'S ATTENDANTS
ON THE JOURNEY.

FINDING that the three persons he sought were still in the ante-chamber, Buckingham directed the gentleman-usher in attendance to summon them, and, this being done, in another minute they were brought into the presence.

Sir Francis Cottington, who was first to enter, was of middle age, being born in 1576. Of a good Somersetshire family, after serving as secretary to Sir Philip Strafford during the reign of Elizabeth, he became attached to the embassy to Spain, and his long residence at Madrid had given him the look of a Spaniard, which was heightened by his olive complexion, dark eyes, and jet-black moustache and beard. His habiliments were of murrey-coloured velvet, and a long Toledo hung from his side. As previously intimated, Sir Francis Cottington was now secretary to Prince Charles, and was, moreover, much in the king's confidence, who constantly consulted him about Spanish affairs, and was generally guided by his advice.

Endymion Porter came next. He was somewhat younger than Cottington, but though not so polished in manner or intelligent-looking as the prince's secretary, he had a pleasant countenance, and a goodly person.

The last to pay reverence to the king was an exceedingly handsome young man. Selected on account of his good looks and agreeable manner to the post of master of the horse, which he filled in Buckingham's princely household, Sir Richard Graham, by the elegance of his attire and personal graces, excited almost as much admiration as his magnificent patron. He was as tall as Buckingham, who was upwards of six feet high, but more

powerfully built than the marquis. Graham's features were regular, and of classical mould, his complexion bright and fresh, his eyes dark blue, his locks brown and curled like those of Antinous, his beard and moustaches of the same hue, and his teeth superb. Sir Richard was a few months younger than Prince Charles, and had recently been knighted by the king at Buckingham's instance.

Glancing round at the trio, James said, "I hae sent for ye, sirs, on a maist important matter, but, before confiding it to ye, I charge ye on your allegiance that ye keep it a profound secret. Mark weel what I say—a profound secret."

"Your majesty may rely upon us," returned the persons addressed.

"Weel, then," continued the king, "I will tell ye what it is without mair ado. Babie Charles and Steenie hae resolved to travel post to Madrid, to fetch the Infanta. Never stare, sirs—never stare! as if ye thought I were jesting—it's the truth. They mean to travel post, I tell ye, incognito, and with only three attendants, and have made choice of you."

This unexpected intelligence produced a marked effect on the hearers. All three were surprised by it, and Cottington trembled so violently, that he could scarcely support himself.

"What ails ye, Sir Francis?" cried James. "Dinna ye like the expedition?"

"Of a truth, my liege, I do not," replied Cottington; "and I would fain dissuade his highness from so hazardous an undertaking. I know the Spaniards well, and am therefore sensible of the risk he will incur."

"Ye hear that, Babie Charles?" cried James. "Sir Francis is an honest man, and speaks truth, however distasteful it may be, without fear. He is of our ain opinion."

"I have already told your majesty that I am determined to go, be the danger what it may," said Charles, glancing sternly at his secretary as he spoke. "I should be loth to take Sir Francis with me against his will."

"Let him stay behind," cried Buckingham. "How say you, sirs?" he added to the two others. "Are you content to go with us?"

"I shall be proud and happy to attend his highness and your grace," rejoined Endymion Porter; "and I see no risk whatever in the expedition. The prince will be heartily welcomed by his Spanish majesty—of that I am well assured."

"For my part, I shall account it a great distinction to share, however humbly, in an enterprise so heroic," observed Sir Richard Graham. "The proposed expedition is, in all respects, suited to a prince so chivalrous as his highness, and I marvel not that he desires to undertake it. Danger enhances the glory of any great achievement, and, should peril occur, we shall know how to encounter it."

"Well spoken, Dick," cried Buckingham. "It is only Cottington who fears danger."

"It is my devotion to the prince that fills me with apprehension, and prompts me to dissuade him from the journey," returned Cottington. "If his highness will not heed my warning, I am ready to go with him, to guide him, and strive to protect him from peril, but I cannot reconcile it to myself to hold my tongue when advice may be useful."

"No more of this, sir," cried Charles, angrily.

"Nay, chide him not, Babie Charlie, he means weel," interposed James. "What hae ye to say, Sir Francis? Speak out, man—speak out—I command ye!"

"Since your majesty lays your injunctions upon me, I must obey," replied Cottington. "Not only do I feel that the expedition will be attended with many risks, but so far from promoting the match, I am confident it will put an end to it. Should the prince be so rash as to place himself in the hands of the Spaniards, they will make fresh demands, and detain him till their exactions are complied with. Assured of this, I deem it incumbent upon me to warn his highness before he runs headlong into the trap. The grand aim of the Spanish

cabinet is to advance the Romish faith in England, and this they will be enabled to do, if the prince delivers himself into their hands."

"Ye are right, Sir Francis—ye are right," cried James. "I see it a' now. The step would be fatal, but, Heaven be praised, it is not yet ta'en! If the Spaniards ance get possession of ye, Babie Charlie, the Pope will be able to dictate his ain terms, and will make the restitution of his speeritual power and the restoration of the Romish faith the price of your release."

"This is idle, sire," remarked Charles. "I have too much faith in Spanish honour to doubt for a moment the treatment I shall experience from Philip IV Spain is the most chivalrous country in Europe."

"But the most perfidious," cried the king. "I will not trust my bairn to traitors. I willna let you go."

"If you violate your promise, sire, you must take the consequences," rejoined Charles, sternly. "I swear to you I will never marry."

"But, my ain bairn——"

"I swear it," repeated Charles, emphatically.

"If your majesty breaks a promise thus solemnly made," said Buckingham, contemptuously, "no credit will in future be attached to aught you may assert. Your word is passed, and cannot be recalled."

"Hear me, Steenie—hear me, Babie Charlie! I implore you baith to listen to me!" cried the king.

"Nothing you can say will move me, sire," rejoined Buckingham, haughtily. "Such vacillation is unworthy of you. As to you, Cottington," he added, in a menacing tone, "you will repent your mischievous interference."

"Even if I should be unlucky enough to forfeit his highness's favour as well as yours, my lord, I shall never repent what I have done," replied Cottington. "As a faithful servant of the prince, I am bound to endeavour to deter him from a step which I feel may be fraught with fatal consequences. Having discharged my duty, I have nothing more to say. It is for his majesty to decide."

"Release me frae my promise, Babie Charlie! — release me, Steenie!" cried James, in almost piteous accents.

But both looked at him coldly and contemptuously, and neither made reply.

At this moment a head, covered with a fool's cap, surmounted by a coxcomb, was thrust from out the tapestry opposite the king, and a mocking voice exclaimed, "Ye seem perplexed, gossip. Will ye take a fool's advice?"

"What, hast thou been playing the spy upon us, Archie?" exclaimed the king, by no means displeased at the interruption. "Come forth instanter, sirrah!"

Thus exhorted, a fantastic little personage, clad in motley, holding a bauble, and having a droll, though somewhat malicious expression of countenance, stepped forth from his place of concealment. It was the court jester, Archie Armstrong.

"Hast thou been there all the time, knave?" demanded James.

"Ay, gossip," returned Archie, "and I have not lost a word of the discourse. I approve of Babie Charlie's visit to Spain, but he must take my cap with him, and if Philip allows him to come back, he may leave it as a parting gift to his majesty."

"Tell me what I shall do, Archie?" cried the king. "I am well-nigh at my wits' end."

"Then are you close to folly, gossip," returned Archie. "But since you ask me, I will tell you what you must *not* do. Break not your word, or you will never more be trusted."

"Right, fool," said Buckingham, approvingly.

"Balk not the prince your son's humour," pursued Archie, "or you will never have a daughter-in-law."

"Excellent counsel," said Charles. "Wisdom proceeds from the lips of fools."

"Make up your mind to what cannot be helped, gossip," said Archie to the king. "Babie Charlie and Steenie *will* go to Madrid, and there is no use in saying them nay; you had best yield with a good grace."

James seemed to be of this opinion, for, after a brief pause, he exclaimed:

"Aweel, my bairns, I can hauld out nae longer. E'en gang your gait; and may gude come of the journey."

"Folly, you see, has carried the day," said Archie to Cottington.

Having thus regained their ground, the prince and Buckingham overwhelmed the old monarch with thanks, terming him the most indulgent of fathers and the best of kings. These demonstrations brought tears to James's eyes—tears of dotage, Buckingham thought them.

"Buss me, Babie Charlie, buss me," cried James, tenderly embracing his son. "Ah! ye little heed, my bonnie bairn, what pangs ye are about to inflict on your auld dad. But why not delay your departure for a few days? I hae mich to think of—my mind is sair distraught the noo—mich advice to gie you."

"There is far more danger in delay than in the journey itself," observed Charles, well knowing that a few hours might cause a change in his father's disposition. "We shall start at an early hour to-morrow morning. Meantime, with your gracious permission, we will send Cottington and Endymion Porter to Dover, to hire a vessel to transport us to Boulogne."

"Weel, weel, it shall be sae," groaned James—"but what a tempting of Providence to trust the hope of the kingdom to a frail shallop! If ill betide, I shall have meikle to answer for."

"Cottington will provide us with a stout ship, and the wind will favour us, sire," said Charles, "so you need be under no apprehension for our safety."

"I see 'tis in vain to reason wi' ye," returned his father. "Gang to Dover as fast as ye can, Sir Francis," he added to Cottington, "and tak Endymion Porter wi' ye. Hire a good ship for the voyage."

"Set out with all despatch, I pray you, Cottington," said Charles. "You will obtain funds for the journey from my comptroller. Have all ready for our embarka-

tion on Wednesday morning. We trust to be at Dover to-morrow night."

"All shall be ready for your highness," replied Cottington. "I now take leave of your majesty."

"Fare ye weel, my faithful Cottington," said James, giving him his hand to kiss. "Ye will hae a precious charge. I needna bid ye tak care of my bairns."

Cottington said nothing, but bowing profoundly to his majesty, quitted the cabinet with Endymion Porter.

Scarcely was he gone than James cried out hastily, "Stop them!—stop them! I hae something more to say."

"Impossible sire," rejoined Buckingham, who justly dreaded lest the king should veer back to the old quarter. "If you have any further directions to give, we will attend to them. But let me pray your majesty to regard our project more cheerfully. You will have us back with the Infanta before Whitsuntide, and then I warrant me you will commend us for the exploit."

"Ye are more sanguine than I am, Steenie," groaned the king. "I never look to see either of ye again, and that makes me sae sad."

"Think of the bonnie princess, with her rich dowry, gossip," said Archie. "I guess you will be glad to see her. Think of your son-in-law, the Count Palatine, and how rejoiced he will be at the restitution of his dominions."

"I believe thou art in the plot against me, sirrah," said the king, cheering up a little. "And now, my bairns," he continued, "though ye winna let me send aught *afore* ye to Madrid, or procure ye a safe-conduct through France frae our ambassador, Sir Edward Herbert, I shall not fail to send *after* ye a' ye may need to grace ye at the court of Madrid, as braw apparel, jewels, horses, and the like. I dinna doubt but half my court will follow ye."

"Prithee, gossip, let me go with the prince's train," entreated Archie.

"Nay, I shall need thee to divert my melancholy," returned James.

"I shall add to your dulness, an you detain me, gossip," rejoined Archie. "All my mirth will vanish."

"Then have thy will, and gae," rejoined James. Then turning to his son and Buckingham, he added, "Be not afeared that ony tidings of your departure will reach France for some days, for on Wednesday I will stop all couriers, and lay an embargo on all vessels bound to ony French port. And now once more adieu, my bonnie bairns. Sair I am to lose you, but greeting will not mend the matter." So saying, he tenderly embraced them both, and bestowed his blessing upon them.

On quitting his father, Charles manifested considerable emotion, but Buckingham took leave of his royal master with apparent unconcern.

As Sir Richard Graham made a reverence to the king before following them, James said to him, "I hae a question to ask ye, Dick, and I require a straightforward answer. Are ye wholly unfettered, man—eh?"

"I do not exactly understand your majesty," returned the young man.

"Then ye are duller than I thought. Hae ye breathed vows to ony fair dame or damsel at our court? Hae ye tied love-knots? Ye are of an amorous complexion, and like eneuch to hae a sweetheart. Hae ye ony engagement?"

"No, sire," replied Graham. "In that respect I am as free as air."

"Then tak my advice, man, and bring back a rich Spanish wife wi' ye," said James.

"I will endeavour to obey your majesty," replied Graham.

And with a fresh reverence he followed the prince and Buckingham out of the cabinet, leaving the king alone with Archie.

III.

HOW TOM AND JACK SET OUT ON THEIR JOURNEY; AND HOW THEY
GOT TO THE FERRY NEAR TILBURY FORT.

LATER in the day, in pursuance of the plan arranged between him and the prince, Buckingham quitted York House, and, attended by Sir Richard Graham, repaired to New-Hall, in Essex—a noble mansion, which he had purchased only two years previously from the Earl of Sussex, to whose brother it had been granted by Queen Elizabeth.

Situated between Chelmsford and Waltham Abbey, and surrounded by an extensive park, well stocked with deer, and boasting much fine timber, New-Hall had been a favourite hunting-seat of Henry VIII., who termed it, from the beauty of the site, Beaulieu. It was a vast structure, consisting of two large quadrangles, and possessed, among other stately chambers, a grand banquetting-hall, nearly a hundred feet in length, and proportionately wide and lofty, in which bluff King Hal had often feasted on the venison killed in the park, and which was still adorned with his arms sculptured in stone. James I. delighted in New-Hall, and counselled his favourite to buy the mansion, probably providing the funds for the purchase, and here he often visited Buckingham, chasing the deer in the park, and carousing in the great hall.

While Buckingham proceeded to his country-seat, Charles started for Theobalds, where he remained till evening, when he rode with but slight attendance to New-Hall. On arriving at his destination he sent back his attendants, telling them he should remain in privacy with his lordship of Buckingham for two or three days, and giving one of them a letter to be conveyed next morning to the king. The singularity of this step excited some surprise among the prince's attendants, and they

hazarded many guesses at the motive of this sudden visit to New-Hall. All these conjectures, however, were wide of the truth. Charles was very unceremoniously welcomed by Buckingham. They supped together in the great hall, but without state, and were only attended by Sir Richard Graham—the serving-men standing out of earshot—and almost immediately after the meal, the marquis and his royal guest retired to rest. All needful preparations for the journey were entrusted to Graham, who delightedly undertook the task.

Long before daylight next morning, the two adventurous companions were called by Graham, who assisted the prince to attire himself in a riding-dress of far plainer stuff than he had ever worn before, and this office performed, the young knight went to render the same service to his patron, but found it needless, Buckingham being already fully equipped in a suit exactly resembling that of the prince.

A few minutes later, when Charles and his favourite met in a chamber where a collation had been laid over-night, they surveyed each other for a moment in silence, and then burst into laughter at the change wrought in their appearance, as well by their apparel as by the false beards with which they had disguised their features. Sir Richard Graham, who was standing by, shared in their merriment. He was similarly habited, and his riding-dress, which was of dark green cloth, with boots drawn up above the knee, became him extremely well, but he had not deemed it necessary to mask his handsome countenance as the others had done.

“Will it please your highness to taste this capon?” he said, as Charles sat down at table.

“Help me—but give me no title, Dick,” replied the prince. “Till I reach Madrid, I have laid aside my rank, and am now plain Jack Smith.”

“And I am his brother Tom—forget not that, Dick,” added Buckingham.

“Furthermore, thou art licensed to sit in our pre-

sence," pursued Charles. "During the journey we are equals."

Notwithstanding this gracious permission, Sir Richard hesitated to avail himself of it, but Buckingham enforcing the order, he took a seat, and all ceremony being now laid aside, he proceeded to lay in a good stock of the viands spread out before him.

"I would I had as good an appetite as thou hast, Dick," cried the prince, admiring his prowess. "I have vainly tried to get through this capon's wing, while thou hast made tremendous havoc with the pasty."

"I have not half done yet, your highness—I mean Master Jack Smith, pardon the involuntary slip of the tongue—the fact is, I have slept little, and find myself frightfully hungry."

"Then satisfy thyself, but use despatch, for we must away presently," remarked Buckingham. "Thou may'st eat both for my brother Jack and myself, for I have as sorry an appetite as he. Take a cup of sack, Jack, to the success of our expedition."

"With all my heart," replied Charles, filling a goblet, while Graham followed their example. "The wine has done me good," pursued the prince. "Hast thou finished, thou insatiable glutton?"

"Another moment," responded Graham, hastily disposing of a slice of ham, and swallowing another cup of sack. "There, now I am quite ready. I will go fetch the valises, which are all carefully packed."

So saying he disappeared, but almost instantly returned with the baggage, while the prince and Buckingham, being already booted and spurred, took up their broad-leaved hats, cloaks, and horse-whips, and, moving as noiselessly as they could, proceeded to a private staircase which conducted them to a postern-door. This door being unlocked by Buckingham, the party found themselves in the garden, but marching quickly, under the guidance of Graham, they threaded a long yew-tree alley, and soon reached an outlet into the park. On issuing forth, not-

withstanding the obscurity, for it was not yet light, they could distinguish three mounted grooms, each of whom held a horse by the bridle.

Without a word, Charles vaulted into the saddle of the steed nearest him, Buckingham followed his example, while Graham, consigning the valises to the groom, was instantly on the back of the third horse.

Just as they started, a clock placed in an inner court of the hall struck five.

In another moment the trio, attended by the grooms, were galloping down a sweeping glade, skirted by lordly trees, then of course bereft of half their beauty, from want of foliage.

While they were thus speeding along, Buckingham remarked that the prince's looks were fixed on the heavens, and he asked what he was gazing at?

"At yon star," replied Charles. "'Tis hers!"

"It heralds you on to Madrid," said the marquis.

"Perchance it is shining upon her **at this moment**," cried Charles, with all a lover's rapture.

"Like enough, if her casement be open," rejoined Buckingham.

Charles did not hear the remark, but exclaimed, aloud:

"Mistress of my heart! life of my life! I am about to seek thee in a foreign land, and will not return till I can bring thee back with me."

Blissful visions rose before him, and he fell into a reverie, which lasted till they were out of the park.

A narrow lane brought them to the high road to Chelmsford. Pursuing this till they got within a short distance of the town, they struck into a by-road on the left, and, fording the Chelmer at Moulsham, shaped their course through a series of lanes, passing by Badow, Sandon, and Hanningfield, until at last they mounted the hill on which Bellericay is perched.

Though still wanting an hour to sunrise, it had become sufficiently light to enable them, from the eminence they had gained, plainly to discern the broad river they designed to cross, and the Kentish hills on the opposite

bank. Turning their gaze in this direction, they fancied they could even distinguish Gravesend. Before entering Bellericay they dismounted, and, consigning their horses to the grooms, dismissed the men, with strict injunctions of silence.

"An ye breathe a word of what has occurred, your tongues shall be cut out," said Buckingham; "but if ye are discreet, ye shall be well rewarded."

As the grooms rode off, Charles and Buckingham proceeded towards the Crown Inn, where post-horses were to be had, followed by Graham, carrying the baggage.

At the door of the hostel stood a waggon with a long team of horses, and several persons were collected around to witness the departure of the vehicle for London.

Seeing this, the prince and Buckingham halted, leaving Graham to go on and order the horses. As the young man approached the house, he was addressed by a sharp-looking little personage, who proved to be Master Ephraim Cogswell, the host.

"Good morrow, fair sir," said Cogswell, doffing his cap. "Are you going by the waggon? If so, you are just in time."

"No, friend," replied Graham. "Myself and my masters are not bound for London, but for Rochester, and we want post-horses to take us to Tilbury Fort, whence we propose to cross the Thames to Gravesend. We shall need a postboy to attend us, and carry the baggage."

"How many are ye, master? Ha! I sec," he added, noticing Charles and Buckingham in the distance. And, after giving the necessary orders to an ostler, bidding him use despatch, he added, "May I make so bold as to ask how your masters are named, sir? They cannot be of this neighbourhood, for I remember them not, though I think I have seen your face before."

"Like enough," returned Graham. "It is not the first time I have been at Bellericay. My masters are the two Smiths."

At this moment the landlord was called by a pas-

senger in the waggon, and shortly afterwards the vehicle was set in motion, and proceeded on its way. The host then returned to the charge.

"You said that your masters are named Smith, sir," he remarked to Graham. "Are they of this county?"

"You are inquisitive, mine host," returned Graham. "They are the brothers Smith, of Saffron Walden, and are tanners by trade. I am their man."

"They don't look much like tanners, friend," observed Cogswell, "nor you like a tanner's man. However, it's no business of mine. But here come the hackneys."

And, as he spoke, the horses were brought out of the stable, ready saddled and bridled. Seeing which, Charles and Buckingham came forward.

"No more tanners than I am a tanner," murmured Cogswell, eyeing them narrowly as they approached. "I will consent to have my own hide curried if they be not noblemen. Give your lordships good day," he added, bowing respectfully to them.

"Lordships! What means the fellow?" cried Buckingham. "Hast thou been jesting with him, Dick?" he added to Graham.

"Ay, that he has," returned Cogswell. "He avouched that your lordships bore the common name of Smith, and were nothing better than tanners. But that won't pass with me. Ephraim Cogswell can tell a nobleman when he sees him. And, but for your lordship's black beard, I would venture to affirm that I am standing in the presence of the Marquis of Buckingham himself."

"You are mistaken, friend," returned the marquis, "and I counsel you not to repeat that pleasantry, as if it chance to reach the ears of my lord of Buckingham, he is likely to resent the liberty taken with his name."

"Nay, I meant no offence," replied Cogswell, bowing. "I know how to hold my tongue."

Somewhat annoyed by this occurrence, Charles and Buckingham mounted their horses and rode off, and were followed by Graham and a postboy, with the baggage.

Passing through the town, the party kept on the ridge

of the hill for some distance, and then descended to Little Burstled. In less than an hour from quitting Bellericay, after crossing Langdon Hill, and passing over Horndon Hill, they reached Tilbury Fort, where, quitting their horses, and paying the postboy, they instantly embarked on board the ferry-boat, and ordered the two men in charge of it to convey them with all despatch to Gravesend.

IV.

HOW JACK AND TOM WERE TAKEN FOR HIGHWAYMEN ON GAD'S HILL.

THE morning was clear but cold, and a strong northeasterly wind ruffled the water, and sent the ferry-boat quickly along. The passage across the river was not without interest to Jack and Tom. Wrapping their cloaks around them to screen them from the blast, they amused themselves, in the first instance, by examining Tilbury Fort, which seemed to menace them with its guns. They next gazed admiringly down the wide and long reach called "the Hope," skirted on one side by the white cliffs of Kent, and on the other by the woody hills of Essex; then noted the appearance and manœuvres of some passing vessels; and lastly, as they neared Gravesend, turned their attention to the blockhouse, battery, and wharf, and commented upon the ships, some of considerable burden, lying off the port.

While his leaders were thus occupied, Graham, in order to pass the time, entered into conversation with the master ferryman, a weather-beaten old fellow named Randal Fowler, and praised the quickness of his boat.

"Ay, ay, she is a gallant little craft, sure enough," replied the ferryman. "She has done wonders in her day, and, moreover, has had some great folks aboard of her."

"Indeed, what great personages have you had the luck to carry?"

"Marry, the greatest was the Lord High Admiral," returned Randal.

"Nonsense, man, you don't mean to say that the Lord High Admiral has used your boat?" cried Graham, glancing at Buckingham.

"Yes I do, master," replied the ferryman, proudly.

"I don't recollect the circumstance, fellow," remarked Buckingham; "that is," he added, correcting himself, "I never heard that the Lord High Admiral had crossed the river by this ferry."

"It wasn't here, but in the Medway, that his lordship used my boat," rejoined Randal. "I took him and the Earl of Rutland to see the ships lying at Sheerness. I shan't forget it, for I got a piece of gold for the job. May I make so bold as to ask whither you are bound, masters?"

"For France," replied Buckingham, in a tone calculated to put an end to further inquiries.

But old Randal was not to be checked, and he was about to ask further questions, when Graham observed to him, in a low tone:

"Don't trouble the gentlemen further. They are going across the water to fight a duel."

"Can't they cut each other's throats, if they are so minded, in this country?" observed Randal. "It seems a waste of time and money to go so far on such an errand. However, that's no concern of mine."

With this he proceeded to let down the sail, calling to his man to look out, and in a few minutes more they were close to the landing-place. When Graham took out his purse to pay the fare, he could find no silver within it, and his companions were unable to assist him. They had all plenty of gold, but no small change. Old Randal had only a few pence in his greasy leather pouch, and as to changing a jacobus, that was out of the question.

"Give him a couple of gold pieces," cried Buckingham. "We can't be detained a moment in landing."

As Graham obeyed the order, and placed the glittering coin in Randal's horny hands, the old ferryman exclaimed, in tones that bespoke his gratitude, "I heartily thank your honours. You are generous as princes—far more generous than the Lord High Admiral. This is the best fare I ever got, and if I could only earn as much every time I cross the Thames, I should soon be rich. Take an old man's advice, and make up your quarrel. You are goodly gentlemen both, and it would be a thousand pities if either of you were harmed."

"Hold thy peace, friend," said Graham, stopping him. "Thou hast got more than thy deserts. Be content."

"I am content—more than content," persisted Randal; "but I would fain prevent bloodshed. Beseech ye, good sirs, to listen to me."

But he spoke to deaf ears, for no sooner did the boat touch the strand than the prince and Buckingham leaped ashore, and ran up the steps, passing as quickly as they could through the crowd of seafaring men and others collected on the wharf. They were speedily followed by Graham, charged with the baggage, for he resolutely refused the offer of Randal to carry it for him, not wishing to be troubled further with the old man. The party at once proceeded to the Falcon, where post-horses were kept.

As soon as his passengers were gone, old Randal took out the two jacobuses he had received, and, while feasting his eyes upon them, he thought it would be a lasting reproach to him if he allowed the duel to take place; and coming to the conclusion that the kindest and most Christian thing he could do was to have the gentlemen arrested, and bound over to keep the peace towards each other, he left his boat, and went to inform the portreve, as the chief officer of the town was designated, of the matter that had come to his knowledge.

The portreve, fully believing his story, at once de-

spatched two officers to the Falcon to arrest the intending combatants, and bring them before him; but, on arriving at the post-house, the officers found that the persons of whom they were in quest had started full a quarter of an hour before. However, as the portreve's orders were peremptory, they ordered post-horses, and set off after the travellers, and being well mounted, made sure of overtaking them before they could reach Rochester.

Meanwhile, the three companions, attended as before by a postboy carrying their baggage, had passed through the rich gardens surrounding the town, mounted the windmill-crowned heights, whence such an extensive and beautiful prospect is obtained, had ridden on through Chalk-street and past the thick woods of Maplesden, and did not slacken their pace till they reached the foot of Gad's Hill.

"Here we are at Gad's Hill—the scene of one of Falstaff's exploits," quoth Tom to Jack, as they were slowly ascending the eminence. "Hereabouts, the fat knight, with Bardolph and Peto, robbed the travellers of the gold they were conveying to the king's exchequer, and here the rogues, in their turn, were stripped of their booty and soundly belaboured by the madcap Prince Hal, and Poins. But even in our own day," added Tom, "Gad's Hill has an ill repute, and these thickets are still haunted by knights of the post and minions of the moon, who sally forth to bid the traveller stand and deliver, on peril of his life. Heaven grant we meet with no such caitiffs! Were they to ease us of the twenty-five thousand pounds we carry with us in bills of exchange on Paris and Madrid, besides our gold, they would obtain a rich spoil, and might hinder our journey."

"Prithee, not so loud, Tom," said Jack, glancing around suspiciously—"you may be overheard; and though I delight in adventures, I have no fancy for an encounter with highwaymen."

"Let us push on, then, Jack," rejoined Tom. "As I have just told you, this is a dangerous spot."

Putting their horses in motion, they soon reached the

brow of the hill. Here, on the left of the road, stood a small hostel, called the Leather Bottle, and as Jack, who was charmed with the beauty of the scene, halted for a moment, the postboy found time to drain a horn of humming ale. Presently the travellers resumed their journey, and were descending the hill, which on this side, as on the other, was covered by wood, when they descried a large coach drawn by four horses coming towards them. Near this carriage, and apparently conversing with some one inside it, rode a richly-attired gentleman, attended by three or four mounted lacqueys.

"By Heaven! Jack, that is one of the royal carriages!" exclaimed Tom, calling on the other to halt. "And do you not perceive that the person who is riding beside it is no other than Sir Lewis Lewkner? Plague take him! What can he be doing here? This is the last place where one would expect to meet the master of the ceremonies."

"'Tis an unlucky chance that has brought him here," cried Jack. "He is certain to recognise us. We must turn back."

"No; let us put a bold front upon it, and dash rapidly past the coach. We shall escape notice," cried Tom.

"Impossible!" returned Jack. "It is the Comte de Tillières who is in the carriage. I caught a glimpse of his features just this moment."

"You are right," observed Tom. "It is the French ambassador. I saw him myself quite plainly. Look! he is now thrusting his head through the window."

"And see! they have stopped the carriage, and are consulting together," cried Jack. "They evidently take us for highwaymen, and are preparing to resist our attack."

"Shall we attack them, Jack?" said Tom, gaily. "To rob the French ambassador and the master of the ceremonies would be an exploit worthy of Prince Hal himself, and would be 'argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever.'"

"The matter is too serious for jesting," replied Jack, gravely "Here comes Sir Lewis Lewkner. Shall we confront him, or beat a retreat?"

As he spoke, the master of the ceremonies rode towards them, with the evident intention of demanding their business. But they did not wait for his approach. Finding it impossible to avoid the encounter, which must have resulted in a discovery, Jack struck spurs into his horse, and leaping a low hedge on the right, plunged into the wood. Tom dashed after him, and Graham ordered the postboy to follow, but as the lad hesitated, he seized his horse, and, by a vigorous application of the whip, forced the animal to clear the hedge.

Just as this was accomplished, Sir Lewis Lewkner came up with the lacqueys, and called out, "Stand! if you are an honest man, and give an account of yourself!" Then, looking at the other more narrowly, he added, "Either my eyes deceive me, or it is Sir Richard Graham? But why this garb? Whom have you with you, Sir Richard?"

"Those are my friends, Jack and Tom Smith," roared Graham. And without another word, he jumped the hedge and disappeared in the thicket, leaving the master of the ceremonies completely bewildered. On recovering from his surprise, Sir Lewis returned to the coach, and told the ambassador what had occurred.

"A strange notion has come into my head," he added. "I feel confident that it was Sir Richard Graham whom I beheld, and I am almost equally certain that the persons with him, whom he called Jack and Tom Smith, were no other than the Prince of Wales and the Marquis of Buckingham."

"You amaze me," cried the Comte de Tillières. "The prince and Buckingham! in disguise, travelling under feigned names, and without attendants! This is the road to Dover. Parbleu! can they be going to France?"

"That is highly improbable, your excellency," returned Sir Lewis, who began to feel that he had said too much.

Nothing more passed till they reached the summit of the hill, when they perceived two men galloping towards them. These were the officers, who halted as they came up, and one of them, respectfully saluting Sir Lewis, inquired whether three gentlemen had passed them on the road; adding, that he had an order from the portreve of Gravesend for their arrest, as they were about to cross over to France to fight a duel.

"Aha! this proves they could not be the persons I suspected," observed Sir Lewis to the ambassador, who did not, however, appear entirely satisfied. "The gentlemen you are in pursuit of," added Lewkner to the officer, "avoided us, and took refuge in yonder wood. Possibly, they may have returned to the high road."

"Not a doubt of it," replied the officer.

"I should like to know the result of this adventure," observed the Comte de Tillières. "Go with these officers, Martin," he added to one of his mounted attendants, "and bring me word what happens. Thou wilt find me at Gravesend."

Adding a few words in a lower tone, he placed a purse in Martin's hands, and dismissed him.

As Martin galloped off with the officers, the coach was again put in motion, and the ambassador and Lewkner pursued their way towards Gravesend.

V.

HOW JACK AND TOM WERE PURSUED BY THE OFFICERS FROM GRAVESEND.

As had been conjectured, the travellers left the covert in which they had sought shelter and returned to the high road, speeding along it till they came to Strood Hill, from the summit of which they obtained a charming view of Rochester, with its ancient castle, its cathedral, and other picturesque structures, as well as of the adjacent town of Chatham, and the district watered by the winding Medway.

While they were pausing to examine this noble prospect, the postboy warned them that they were pursued, and pointed out the two officers and Martin, who were scouring along the valley about a mile off. At this sight the travellers immediately started again, and, dashing down the hill, speedily reached Strood. Next crossing the old wooden bridge at Rochester, and entering that fair city—then, as now, one of the most picturesque and beautiful in England—they rode along the High-street, till they reached Chatham.

Their horses were in such good condition, that it was evident they could hold out for another stage, so, quitting Chatham, they mounted another lovely hill, from the summit of which a delightful and extensive view greeted them, comprehending almost the whole of the meandering Medway, with Standgate Creek, Sheerness, the Nore, and the distant coast of Essex.

Nearer at hand the prospect was yet more enchanting, being composed of hill and dale, villages, churches, and homesteads, hop-grounds, apple-orchards, cherry-orchards, and all that can contribute to the embellishment of an English landscape. Of course, at this season of

the year, when the hop-grounds lacked their garniture, when the orchards had no ripe produce, when the fields were bare of crops, and the woods leafless, the picture was deprived of much of its charm. Still, even with these disadvantages, it was *so* beautiful, that Charles, as he gazed at it with a raptured eye, exclaimed:

"Drayton speaks truth when he says, in his 'Polyolbion,'

O famous Kent!

What county hath this Isle that may compare with thee!

Fairer scene than this cannot be imagined. Yon broad and winding river, hastening on to mingle its waters with those of the Thames before they both are lost in the sea—those charming hills—those pompous woods—those ancient mansions—those reverend fabrics—those towns and hamlets—all bespeaking peace and plenteousness. Can any picture be more lovely?"

"None, none," replied Buckingham, who either felt or feigned a like enthusiasm. "It is only in England—perhaps only in this county—that such a prospect can be seen. We shall find nothing like it in Spain, you may depend, Jack. You must bring the Infanta to behold it."

"I shall not fail," replied Charles.

At this moment, Graham, who had been lingering behind, called out:

"Those rascally officers are coming quickly after us. They have not stopped at Rochester, as we expected, but have passed through Chatham, and are even now scaling this hill."

"Plague take the knaves!" cried Tom, impatiently. "Why should we concern ourselves about them?"

"They will cause us delay, and every hour—every minute—is of importance," returned Jack. "Let us on. We shall reach Sittingbourne before them, and it is not likely they will proceed beyond that place."

"On, then, to Sittingbourne," cried Tom.

And the whole party rapidly descended the hill.

At the foot of the eminence, on a common, where a road branched off to Maidstone, stood a large triangular gibbet, from which dangled the grisly skeletons of three robbers who once haunted the neighbouring thickets, and had been the terror of all travellers on that way. With a glance of disgust at these loathly objects, Jack and his companions rode on through Hambley woods, past Rainham, through the old town of Newington, on the farther side of which they mounted Keycall Hill, descending upon Key-street, after which they came in sight of Milton, an ancient town famous for its oysters, and once possessing a palace built by Alfred, but subsequently destroyed by Earl Godwin in the reign of Edward the Confessor.

Farther on, they passed the remains of Castle Rough, another fortress built by Alfred, and then entering Sittingbourne, rode at once to the Red Lion, and called for post-horses.

These were brought out with so much expedition, that the travellers were mounted and off full five minutes before their pursuers came up. Great disappointment was expressed by the latter on their arrival, and the officers would have relinquished the chase, but they were induced to go on by Martin, who paid for their post-horses, and promised to reward them liberally.

Jack and Tom were now three or four miles ahead, and had already passed Hempstead and Radfield, had cleared the little village of Green-street, and were making their way, at a rapid pace, along Watling-street (the ancient Roman road), by Norton Ash, Stone, and Raven Hill, towards Ospringe.

While mounting Ospringe Hill, on which a beacon then stood, they cast a look towards Feversham, Davington, and the marshy tract adjoining the Swale, bringing the Bay of Whitstable within their ken.

From Ospringe, about twenty minutes' hard riding brought them to Boughton Hill, from the summit of which they obtained a magnificent view over the woody

district known as the Forest of Blean. From this point they first descried the lofty tower of Canterbury Cathedral rising above the woods.

In Blean Forest, which then extended for many miles in the direction of the sea, the wild-boar was still hunted, and in times more remote bears had been found within its recesses. After a brief survey of this grand woodland prospect, they once more got into motion, and were soon buried amid dusky groves.

On emerging from the forest at Harbledown, they beheld the ancient city of Canterbury, with its ramparts, towers, gates, churches, and other edifices, overtopped by the noble cathedral, about a mile distant. This space being soon cleared, they crossed a bridge over a branch of the river Stour, and passing through the West-gate, a strong and stately structure flanked by two round towers, and defended by a portcullis, entered a long street bordered on either side by old and picturesque habitations.

VI.

HOW JACK AND TOM WERE VISITED BY MASTER LAUNCELOT STOD-
MARSH, MAYOR OF CANTERBURY.

IT was now not far from noon, and the travellers, having ridden upwards of fifty miles, began to feel that they stood in need of some rest and refreshment. Accordingly, they alighted at an inn bearing as its sign a grotesque portrait of King James, which made both Jack and Tom smile as they regarded it, and, being shown into a chamber by the obsequious host, Christopher Chislet, inquired what eatables he had in the house.

"I can give your honours some rare trout from Fordwich," returned Chislet. "Our Fordwich trout are accounted the finest in England, and such as come not even to the king's table, Heaven bless him! Then you can have a famous shield of brawn, a quarter of a kid, and a chine of beef; and, while you are discussing these, I will prepare you a dish of wild-fowl, or plovers—our plovers are dainty birds, and more toothsome than snipe or woodcock."

"The trout, the chine, and the plovers will suffice," said Tom. "And now, what wines hast thou in thy cellar?"

"Good store, and of the best, an please your honour," responded Chislet. "I have Rhenish and Gascoigne, white wine of Gaillac, and red wine of Bordeaux. Or shall I brew you a pottle of sack, or bring you a flagon of our old Kentish ale? The ale is wondrous strong and bright. I warrant you you shall taste the hops in it."

"I will take thy word for it, mine host," returned Tom; "but we care not for ale, however strong and well hopped. Give us a flask or two of Gaillac, if it be good, and brew a pottle of sack."

"Your honour shall be well contented," said the host.

While the repast was being prepared, Jack and Tom strolled forth to view the cathedral. Being familiar with its internal beauties, they contented themselves with a survey of the exterior, and returned just at the moment that the Fordwich trout were placed upon the table by the host. The repast was thoroughly enjoyed by the travellers, whose long ride had wonderfully sharpened their appetites.

"I never fared better than I have done to-day," observed Jack. "But we must not loiter; so call for the reckoning, Dick, and order the post-horses."

On this, Graham arose and was about to summon the host, when the latter suddenly entered, and, with a look of consternation depicted on his features, cried out:

"His worship the mayor, Master Launcelot Stodmarsh, desires to speak with you, gentlemen."

At the words, a large portly-looking man, with a very red face, strutted into the room. The mayor was followed by two functionaries bearing halberds, who placed themselves one on either side of the door, and was accompanied by Martin and the two officers from Gravesend.

On the entrance of the mayor, Jack and Tom thought it necessary to rise and salute him, and they did so with so much dignity, that the worshipful gentleman began to feel that he was in the presence of persons of importance.

"To what cause are we to attribute the honour of this visit, Mr. Mayor?" demanded Tom. "We are strangers here, and have merely halted in your city on our way to Dover."

"That I understand," replied Stodmarsh, essaying to look dignified in his turn. "But you must excuse me, gentlemen, if I say that I cannot permit your departure till you have given a satisfactory account of yourselves."

"On what plea do you venture to detain us, sir?" inquired Jack, in an authoritative tone, and with a sternness that took the mayor completely aback.

As soon as he had recovered himself, he said, with some respect,

"These officers have a warrant for your arrest from

the portreve of Gravesend, Master Nicholas Holbeach. It is understood that you are about to cross over to France for an unlawful purpose—to fight a duel—a mortal duel—and it is our business to prevent it.”

“Tut! tut! this is idle, sir,” cried Tom. “The portreve has been wholly misinformed. We have no such design. We are peaceable travellers, as you may perceive by our deportment. This is my brother, Jack Smith, and I am not likely to fight him.”

“I must have proof of that assertion, sir,” rejoined the mayor, “as well as of your pacific intentions, before I can allow you to proceed on your journey. Have you no document about you to prove the correctness of your statement?”

“If I had any such document, I should decline to produce it,” replied Tom, haughtily.

“Then you cannot blame me if I doubt your explanation,” rejoined the mayor. “These officers must take you back to Gravesend, to be dealt with as my brother magistrate, the portreve, shall deem meet.”

“Hold! Mr. Mayor,” cried Tom, imperiously. “Listen to me, before you commit yourself——”

“I commit myself!” exclaimed Stodmarsh, greatly offended. “I can allow no such improper language to be used to me. I look upon you as suspicious characters, and authorise your immediate arrest. Do your duty, officers.”

As the men were about to advance, Graham placed himself before them, and said, “Mr. Mayor, allow me to give you a word of advice.”

“Advice, sir—advice!” cried the mayor, swelling with indignation. “I would have you to know that Launcelot Stodmarsh never takes advice.”

“So I should imagine, sir,” replied Graham, coolly. “Nevertheless, let me beg, before anything is done which you may have cause to regret, that you will grant us a word in private.”

“The request is extremely irregular, sir,” rejoined Stodmarsh, calming down. “But I shall not refuse it.

If you have any explanation to give, I am ready to hear it."

And he motioned the landlord and the others to withdraw, telling his own officers to guard the door outside.

The order was obeyed by all except Martin who contrived to slip behind a piece of furniture without being perceived.

"And now, sirs," said Stodmarsh, taking a seat, but allowing the others to remain standing, "what have you to impart to me?"

"Mr. Mayor," said Graham, approaching him, and assuming a tone and manner that could not be mistaken, and that quite confounded the person he addressed, "it is necessary that you should be made aware that you are in the presence of two of the most important persons in the kingdom—his Highness the Prince of Wales and the Lord Marquis of Buckingham."

Thunderstruck by the information, the mayor sprang to his feet, upsetting the chair on which he had been sitting, but perceiving that he still looked incredulous, the prince and Buckingham removed their false beards; whereupon, unable to doubt longer, Stodmarsh threw himself at the feet of Charles, and said, "Pardon, your highness, pardon! I ought to have recognised you and the noble marquis even when disguised."

"There is nothing to forgive, Mr. Mayor," replied Charles, raising him graciously. "It is no reproach to you that you did not recognise us. I owe you an explanation, and you shall have it. All I require from you, on your loyalty to the king my august father, is, that you keep secret what may be disclosed to you."

"Your highness may entirely rely on my discretion," rejoined Stodmarsh.

"The fact is, Mr. Mayor, since you must know the truth," interposed Buckingham, "that in my capacity of Lord High Admiral, I am proceeding to Dover to examine into the condition and discipline of the fleet in the narrow seas, and his highness the prince has deigned to accompany me in the visit. Secresy being essential

to the plan, we are only attended by my equerry, Sir Richard Graham, and are travelling by post, as you perceive. Now you know all. Send back those officers who have come on a fool's errand from Gravesend, and facilitate our departure. Do this, and we shall be perfectly content."

"It shall be done instanter, my gracious lord," replied Stodmarsh, hastening towards the door.

"Hold a moment, while we put on our beards," said Buckingham, as he and the prince resumed their disguises.

This done, the mayor opened the door, and called out, "Ho, there! ho! landlord, I say! Bring out horses without delay for these gentlemen. They have perfectly satisfied me. You constables from Gravesend," he added to the two officers, "can return as you came. Tell the portreve he has been misinformed. Post-horses forthwith for Dover, I say, landlord."

"And the reckoning, let us have that, mine host," added Graham.

As soon as the room was cleared, Martin came out of his hiding-place.

"A pretty discovery I have made," he mentally ejaculated. "The prince and Buckingham! Who would have thought it? This shall to my master."

And, taking out his tablets, he traced a few lines, tore out the leaf, and folded it up.

He then went forth, and found the travellers mounting their horses. Jack was bidding adieu to the mayor, who was respectfully holding his stirrup, much to the host's astonishment. In another moment the party rode out of the court-yard, followed by a postboy with the baggage.

As soon as they were gone, the host observed to the mayor, "Will your worship acquaint me with the names of my guests?"

"Not now—not now, Master Chislet," replied Stodmarsh, mysteriously. "I am not at liberty to speak, but

this I may say to you, your house has been highly honoured—most highly honoured.”

“I judged as much,” returned the host.

Meanwhile, Martin had taken aside one of the officers from Gravesend, and giving him the note he had prepared, desired him to deliver it on his return to the French ambassador.

“His excellency will reward you liberally—most liberally,” he added; “but here is an earnest,” slipping a piece of gold into the constable’s hands. “Tell him I am going to Dover, and will report further.”

With this he ordered a post-horse, and rode after the travellers.

VII.

HOW JACK AND TOM WERE LODGED FOR THE NIGHT IN DOVER CASTLE.

NOTHING particular happened to Jack and Tom till they reached Barham Downs, when they left the road to examine a Roman camp, and while Tom was scrambling down the outer fosse of the earthwork, his horse slipped and threw him. Tom rose next moment without assistance, and none the worse for the fall, but the horse had sprained his shoulder, and could only limp along. Owing to this accident, the progress of the party became necessarily slow, and before they regained the highway, they observed another traveller speeding along in the direction of Dover. They shouted out to him to stop, but though he evidently heard the call, as he looked towards them, he paid no heed to the summons, but rather appeared to accelerate his pace.

“That is one of the men who followed us from Gad’s Hill,” observed Graham. “I saw him in the court-yard

of the inn when we left Canterbury. Why is he riding so fast to Dover? Can he have obtained any information of our project. Shall I ride after him?"

"To what end?" rejoined Jack. "Even if you could overtake him, which is unlikely, you could not stay him. But I feel no sort of uneasiness. It is impossible he can have made any discovery."

"I hope not," returned Graham; "but it looks like it."

The prince now quitted his companions for a short time, and took a solitary gallop over the downs, pausing ever and anon to look around. Little did he dream that some two years later, on the wild waste over which he was careering, a tent would be pitched, wherein his bride (*not* the bride of whom he was in quest, but Henrietta Maria of France) would first receive her court ladies.

After tracking a long valley, hemmed in on either side by lofty chalk ridges, between which ran the little river Dour, the travellers at last came in sight of Dover, with its proud castle crowning the hill on the left.

At this juncture they perceived two horsemen riding towards them, who proved to be Sir Francis Cottington and Endymion Porter.

"Heaven save your highness, and you, my good lord," said Cottington, as he came up with Endymion Porter. "You have made good speed. We thought to meet you on Barham Downs."

"We lamed a horse, or we should have been here an hour ago," returned Charles. "But pray be covered, gentlemen. No ceremony now. Remember that I am only to be addressed as Master Jack Smith, and that this," pointing to Buckingham, "is my brother Tom. But let us hear what you have done."

"I have carried out all the instructions given me," replied Cottington. "I have hired a swiftsailing schooner, the *Fair Maid of Kent*, which, if I be not deceived in her, will convey you speedily to Boulogne; but though she is ready to sail at once, I advise you to delay your departure for a few hours. A strong wind is blowing,

and there is a rough sea, but the captain of the schooner Master Pynchen, feels sure the weather will improve, and he counsels us to wait till morning."

Though he was all impatience to cross, Charles assented to the delay.

On entering the town, the prince and his companions proceeded to an inn, where chambers had been engaged. He did not, however, remain long in-doors, but repaired with his attendants to the harbour, in order to look at the little vessel destined to convey him to the opposite shores. As Cottington had stated, it was blowing hard, and there was evidently a strong sea outside, but the *Fair Maid of Kent* was lying snugly within the port, and her appearance perfectly satisfied both Jack and Tom as to her sea-going qualifications.

While they were examining the little vessel, and debating whether they should go on board her, a party of mounted carabiniers issued from a side street, and rode towards them across the wharf. At the head of this troop was an officer, whom the prince and his companions immediately recognised as Sir Harry Mainwaring, lieutenant of Dover Castle. They also noted that with Sir Harry was the person who had followed them from Gad's Hill to Canterbury, and had passed them on Barham Downs.

On nearing the party, Sir Harry Mainwaring, a stout, handsome man of military deportment, with a grey beard and moustaches, contrasting strongly with his bronzed visage, ordered his men to halt, and then dismounting, left his steed in charge of an equerry. Before advancing towards the party, he ordered two of the troopers to keep off all bystanders, and having seen this done, he marched towards Charles and Buckingham, saluted them, and was about to speak, when Buckingham interposed.

"Sir Harry Mainwaring," said the marquis, "it would be useless in the prince and myself to attempt disguise with you, but it is his highness's desire, and, indeed, command, that you do not allow any look or action to betray your knowledge of his person."

"I obey," replied the lieutenant, "but I fear that his highness's incognito, and your own, my lord, cannot be preserved, since you are both known to the emissary of the French ambassador, who has ridden on to apprise me of your visit. He has contrived to distance you by an hour."

"How came the man to penetrate our secret?" demanded Charles, bending his brow.

"He was present, though unobserved, during your interview with the Mayor of Canterbury," replied Mainwaring. "On the man's arrival at Dover, he rode up at once to the castle, and gave information to me. I did not entirely credit his statement, but immediately came down to satisfy myself, and I now find he spoke truth. Still, I can scarcely believe that the motive he assigned for your visit is correct."

"I know not what he has told you, Sir Harry," returned Charles, "but you shall learn the exact truth. I am proceeding to Madrid, attended by the Marquis of Buckingham and these three gentlemen."

"How? to Madrid with only these attendants!" exclaimed Mainwaring, astounded. "Your highness will forgive me if I cannot repress my astonishment."

"It is even as I have said, Sir Harry," rejoined Charles. "I am going to Madrid on a special errand—nay, there shall be no mystery with you—I am going to fetch the Infanta. I desire to preserve the strictest incognito, and it is of the last importance that no message be sent over to France, as I would not be known during my journey through that kingdom. To-night I purpose to remain at Dover, and I shall sail for Boulogne at an early hour to-morrow, in yon little schconer. I count upon your aid, good Sir Harry."

"I am sorry your highness has confided the project to me," returned Mainwaring, with some hesitation. "I fear it is inconsistent with my duty to allow your departure from the kingdom. Indeed, I dare not permit it."

"'Sdeath! sir, is this language to hold to your prince?" cried Buckingham, in a fury. "You will stay us at your

peril, sir. You forget that I am Constable of Dover Castle, and that you are my subordinate officer."

"No, I do not forget it, my lord," replied Mainwaring, respectfully. "I am ready to obey all your lawful commands. But I have a duty to perform to my sovereign and the state, which is paramount to all other considerations. I will despatch a messenger to Whitehall to ascertain his majesty's pleasure, but, till the man's return, I dare not permit his highness's departure."

"Is it not enough that the prince has vouchsafed to inform you of his intentions?" demanded Buckingham.

"No, my lord," replied Mainwaring, firmly. "For aught I know, the prince may be leaving without his royal father's sanction—nay, contrary to his injunctions."

"By Heaven, this passes all endurance!" cried Buckingham. "But it is idle to reason with one so obstinate and dull-witted. We will go in spite of you."

"No vessel shall quit this harbour till I have the king's warrant for its departure. I will take thus much upon myself, be the consequences what they may," rejoined Mainwaring, in a determined tone.

"Nay, Sir Harry is in the right," observed Charles. "You shall not need to send to Whitehall for my royal father's warrant, sir," he added to the lieutenant. "I have it with me, and will show it you."

"Enough," replied Mainwaring. "With that assurance I am perfectly content, and am ready to obey your behests. Will it please your highness, and you, my good lord, together with those with you, to lodge within the castle to-night? You will be accommodated more suitably than at an inn, and will be secure from all chance of further interruption."

To this proposition Charles readily agreed, whereupon Sir Harry besought him to mount his steed and ride to the castle; but the prince declined the offer, preferring to proceed thither on foot. Mainwaring then despatched a couple of troopers to the inn for the travellers' baggage.

gage, and calling his equerry to him, bade him take back Martin to the castle.

"I will give further orders concerning him when I arrive there," added the lieutenant, "but, meantime, do not allow him to hold communication with any one. These gentlemen," he added, "will be my guests for the night. See that lodgings are prepared for them in the Constable's Tower and in Peverell's Tower."

The equerry bowed, and, in obedience to the order he had received, rode off with the troop, taking Martin with him, who thus found himself a prisoner.

Shortly afterwards, Charles and all those with him quitted the quay, and took the road leading to the Castle Hill.

Arrived at the foot of the eminence, they commenced the ascent by tracking a zig-zag path, which conducted them to a steep flight of steps, and scaling these, they found themselves within a short distance of the outer gate of the fortress.

At this point, the grand old pile, aptly enough described by Matthew Paris as "the key and lock of the realm," reared itself majestically before them; its hoary walls studded with watch-towers girding the entire circumference of the hill, while its massive keep rose proudly amidst them. Charles had visited the fortress on one or two previous occasions, when he had been received with all the honours due to his exalted rank; when the royal banner had floated above the donjon-tower; when trumpets had sounded and drums had been beaten to herald his approach; when the whole garrison was drawn up in the outer court, and the road lined with the inhabitants of Dover; but never at such times had he gazed at the ancient fabric, replete with so many historical recollections, with feelings deep as those that impressed him now. Sentinels in steel cap and corslet, with pike on shoulder, were pacing to and fro on the ramparts; other men-at-arms were stationed on the watch-towers and near the gate, but these were the only inmates of the strong-

hold he beheld. The castle wore its ordinary aspect, and, thus beheld, gained infinitely in grandeur and majesty.

From the castle, Charles turned to look at the town and harbour, and was well pleased to find that the works undertaken by his royal father for the improvement of the pier, which, though strongly built by Henry VIII., had become ruinous through neglect, were making good progress.

Could he have foreseen the stupendous bulwark which an after age was destined to produce; could he have anticipated that the rude and unserviceable pier then constructing would be supplanted, some two hundred and forty years later, by a granite wall projecting far into the sea, and capable of withstanding the utmost fury of the waves; he might have blushed at the insignificance and almost inutility of the work then going on. But, possessing no such foresight, he was well enough content, and deemed it an important achievement.

Rousing himself from the reverie into which he had fallen, he proceeded, with Mainwaring and Buckingham, who were standing near him, towards the gateway of the castle. Little aware of the importance of the personages who were entering the fortress, the guard stationed at the gate contented themselves with saluting the lieutenant, and bestowed a mere glance of curiosity at the others. Still, there was something in the look and deportment of the prince and Buckingham that excited the curiosity of these men.

The party had now entered the outer ballium, and as it was still light enough for an inspection of the fortress, Charles strolled for some time about the courts, examining the various towers on the walls—pausing before the old Roman pharos and the time-hallowed church, supposed to have been founded by King Lucius—after which he directed his course to the keep.

Entering it, and leaving Buckingham and the others in the state apartments on the third story, Charles, accompanied only by Mainwaring, mounted to the summit

of a lofty turret, whence an extraordinary fine view was commanded. It was now growing dusk, but even thus imperfectly beheld, the prospect was very striking. Across the Channel, the grey outline of the coast of France was distinguishable; the position of Calais being fixed by its lighthouse, while another pharos gleamed from Cape Grisnez, near Boulogne. Immediately below was the town, revealed by its twinkling lights, and the harbour with its shipping. Charles tried to make out the *Fair Maid of Kent*, but could not succeed in distinguishing her.

Undisturbed by the whistling wind, Charles remained for nearly a quarter of an hour on this lofty place of observation. He then descended with the lieutenant, and on repairing to the chamber where the others had been left, they were informed by an attendant that the evening repast was served. At this welcome intelligence, the whole party adjourned to the Constable's Tower, in a lower chamber of which a substantial repast was laid out. In compliance with the prince's injunctions, no ceremony whatever was observed during the meal. The whole party sat down together, and the conversation was carried on without restraint. Shortly after supper, Charles and Buckingham, who were somewhat fatigued by their lengthened journey, withdrew to the chambers allotted them, and both slept soundly till they were roused, an hour at least before it was light, by wakeful Graham. The rest of the party were already up, and prepared for departure, and as soon as the prince and Buckingham had partaken of a hasty breakfast, they quitted the castle under the escort of the lieutenant, and followed by four stalwart troopers carrying the baggage.

As they descended the Castle Hill on the way to the harbour, Mainwaring informed Charles that late at night, long after his highness had retired to rest, a messenger had brought a despatch from the king, ordering him to prohibit the departure of all vessels bound for the coast of France. "This order," he added, "I shall carry out as soon as your highness is safely off."

Captain Pynchen was anxiously awaiting his passengers, the wind being now fair, and promising a quick passage. The embarkation was speedily accomplished. Mainwaring saw the prince and Buckingham safely on board, and then wishing them a prosperous voyage, took his leave.

As the *Fair Maid of Kent* weighed anchor, and spread her sails to the favouring breeze, which promised soon to waft her and her precious freight to the shores of France, the morning gun was fired from Dover Castle.

VIII.

HOW JACK AND TOM CROSSED THE CHANNEL, AND RODE POST
FROM BOULOGNE TO PARIS.

FOR some time Charles remained standing on the deck of the schooner, with his gaze fixed upon the shores from which he was rapidly receding. After running his eye along the line of lofty and precipitous chalk cliffs, extending on the right to the South Foreland, and on the left to Sandwich, he turned his regards to the old castle, nowhere beheld to such advantage as from the sea. Precisely at that moment the first beams of the sun began to gild the lofty keep, and ere long the grey walls encircling the hill, with the numerous watch-towers, the antique church, and the pharos, were lit up, until the entire fortress, which had hitherto looked cold and stern, assumed a bright and smiling aspect, which Charles was willing to construe into a favourable omen to his expedition. Not till castle and cliffs began to grow dim in the distance, did he bid a mental adieu to England.

No incident worthy of being chronicled occurred during the passage. When in mid-channel, those in the schooner caught sight of several men-of-war belonging to the fleet which Buckingham had professed he was about to inspect, but in other respects the voyage was monotonous,

and appeared long and tedious to the travellers, all of whom were impatient to get across the Channel. We must not omit to mention that, immediately after their embarkation, Jack and Tom, deeming disguise no longer necessary, had laid aside their false beards.

Just at the hour of two in the afternoon they entered the harbour of Boulogne, and, after some little delay, were permitted by the officers of the port to disembark, and Charles, for the first time, set foot in France.

Cottingham having concluded all arrangements with Captain Pynchen before landing, Jack and Tom underwent no detention on that score, but followed by a couple of sailors carrying their baggage, proceeded to the Ecu d'Or, in the Grande Rue, where they were welcomed by a very civil landlord, who told them they were too late for the table d'hôte, but considerately added that he could speedily set an excellent dinner before them. This was agreed to, but the dinner was not served so promptly as promised, and being copious, took some time to discuss, consequently it was hard upon four o'clock before the travellers were in the saddle. Attended by two gaily-dressed postilions, wearing enormous jack-boots, and who made the quay echo with the clangour of their horns, they rode out of Boulogne, and, crossing a wooden bridge over the Liane, took the road to Montreuil, where they proposed to pass the night, and where they arrived, without accident or interruption, about seven o'clock, and took up their quarters at the Tête de Bœuf, renowned for its pâtés de becassines.

Rising betimes next morning, they were all on horse-back soon after seven, and on the way to Amiens, which they determined to make the limit of that day's journey.

All the party were in high spirits. To Charles the novelty of travelling in a foreign land was exciting, and though the country through which he rode was uninteresting in a picturesque point of view, in his present frame of mind it became invested with charms such as many a really beautiful landscape had not revealed to him. Fortunately the weather was fine, and the state

of the roads good, so that the travellers got on without annoyance.

A joyous company they were—as joyous and light-hearted as any that had preceded them on the same route. Whether it was change of clime and scene, or the excitement they had previously undergone, that occasioned this gaiety, none cared to inquire, being perfectly satisfied with the result. Even Sir Francis Cottington, who had been so strongly averse to the expedition, yielded to the enlivening influences, and began to view the project with a hopeful eye.

Though maintaining his habitual gravity of look, Charles at heart was as gleeful as his companions. Never had he been more entirely free from the melancholy which usually o’ershadowed him—never was the present more void of gloom—never did the future look brighter. Sometimes, in order to indulge in a fit of pleasing musing—to dwell upon the charms of his mistress—to conjure up the idea of their first interview, and his transports on beholding her—he would ride apart from the others—but he soon returned to join in their lively chat.

In this manner they advanced on their journey, scarcely aware how much they had accomplished. After skirting the forest of Crécy, close to which the famous battle was won by Edward III., the thought of which roused the warlike spirit of Charles, and made him burn for the military renown of the Black Prince, they descended into the vale of the Somme, and traversed it till they reached Abbeville.

Here they alighted at the Hôtel de la Poste, situated near the Cathedral of St. Wolfram. At the doorway of the inn several travellers were congregated, who naturally regarded the new comers with curiosity, and speculated upon their quality. There was nothing, as we know, in the attire of any of the party to indicate their rank, and yet those who beheld them could not fail to be struck by the stately looks and deportment of Charles and Buckingham.

It chanced that among the observers on the occasion

there were two gentlemen from St. Valery, who had lately been in England, and they both recognised the illustrious travellers—though almost doubting the evidence of their eyes. All the party had gone into the house with the exception of Graham, who stayed behind to pay the postilion, when one of these gentlemen, M. Marcellin, making a very polite bow, thus addressed the young equerry:

“Pray excuse me, monsieur, but I and my friend M. de Nouvion have recently been in England, and during our stay visited your famous race-course at Newmarket. While there, we had the singular satisfaction of beholding his Highness the Prince of Wales and the Lord Marquis of Buckingham. We saw them, monsieur—or perhaps I ought to say milord—sufficiently long to enable us to study their features carefully, and fix them upon our memory. You will not be surprised then, monsieur, when we declare that in two of your party, who have just gone in with the landlord, we conceive that we recognise Prince Charles and the lord marquis.”

“I take what you say as a great compliment to my friends, messieurs,” returned Graham, without the slightest embarrassment; “but you are mistaken. The gentlemen to whom you refer are very humble individuals—two brothers, the Messieurs Smith. They certainly bear some resemblance to the illustrious personages you have mentioned—enough, perhaps, to deceive a stranger.”

“The resemblance is too striking in both instances to admit of doubt upon the point,” observed M. de Nouvion. “Of course it is not for us to make a remark if the Prince of Wales and the lord marquis choose to travel incognito.”

“I will speedily convince you of your error, messieurs,” interrupted Graham. And stepping within the doorway, he shouted, “*Hola!* Jack and Tom. Come hither for a moment, I pray of you.”

At this summons, Jack and Tom immediately came out of the *salle à manger* into which they had been

ushered by the host, and Jack said, as if addressing an equal, "What do you want with us, Dick?"

"These gentlemen will have it that you are the Prince of Wales and my Lord of Buckingham," replied Graham. "Pray undeceive them, for they will not credit my denial."

"You do us too much honour, messieurs—far too much," observed Jack. "It is not, however, the first time that my brother Tom and myself have been taken for the important personages in question."

"I should think not," said M. Marcellin.

"The resemblance is rather unlucky for us," remarked Tom. "It has more than once got us into difficulties."

"I can easily imagine it," rejoined De Nouvion, sceptically. "It must be unpleasant also for the prince and the lord marquis to be mistaken, as they might be accidentally, for you and your brother, M. Jack Smith. Of course you have seen my lord of Buckingham, monsieur?" he added.

"Oh yes, I have seen him," returned Tom. "We have seen both him and the prince, eh, Jack?"

"Frequently," returned Jack.

"Then you may possibly have remarked, as I did," returned M. De Nouvion, "that the marquis wears a ring on the first finger of the right hand—precisely such a ring as yours, M. Tom Smith—while the prince has a brooch, the counterpart of which fastens the cloak of your brother Jack?"

"Confound the rascal! how closely he must have observed us," whispered Tom to Jack. "Eh bien, messieurs," he added to the others, "if you persist in your belief, there is no more to be said. It would be unreasonable in my brother Jack and myself to be angry with you for so flattering an error, and, though neither of us is likely to become a marquis or a prince of the blood, we must accept the titles for the moment, since you are determined to invest us with them."

So saying, he bowed, as did Jack, and both, laughing heartily, returned to the *salle à manger*, followed by

Graham, and leaving M. de Nouvion and his friend in some perplexity.

It soon became apparent, from the extraordinary deference paid to Jack and Tom, that Messieurs de Nouvion and Marcellin had communicated their opinion as to the real rank of his guests to the hôteier. With a thousand apologies, the host besought his distinguished guests to remove to a private room ; but this they declined, saying they did not desire better accommodation than ordinary travellers.

"You are extremely obliging, my good host," remarked Tom, "but we know the cause of your civility, and it is proper we should set you right. Two gentlemen, with whom we have just been conversing, are under the delusion that we are grand seigneurs travelling incognito. The notion is absurd. We have not the slightest pretension to high rank, and are simply what we seem."

"That is quite possible, milord," replied the hôteier, bowing, "because to me you seem to be princes."

"Sdeath! take us for what you will," cried Tom. "All we ask is, not to be charged like princes. Put nothing down for rank in your reckoning."

The host declared he would not, but failed to keep his word. The best the house could produce was set before his guests; but they had to pay handsomely for their entertainment. Their indifference to the heavy charge which he had not scrupled to make, confirmed the shrewd host in his opinion of their rank. On the departure of the travellers, the whole house assembled in the courtyard to see them mount, and bows and curtsies were made them on all sides, which they very graciously returned.

At Amiens, where they arrived before dusk, they put up at the Hôtel de France, and visited the cathedral during the solemnisation of evening mass—Charles being lost in admiration of the extraordinary architectural beauty of the interior of this noble Gothic pile.

Next morning they started at an early hour for Paris, and did not loiter on their journey. With no little satisfaction they found themselves at Saint Denis, where they

changed horses for the last time. A short stage brought them to the faubourgs of Paris, and they entered the city by the Porte Saint Denis—not the existing triumphal arch, but an older portal, built by Charles IX.

On passing through the gateway, Charles experienced that emotion which every stranger must feel on first beholding a city of which he has heard much and longed to visit. All was new to him—habitations, people, costumes—and he gazed around with insatiable curiosity. His course led him through the Rue Saint Denis, and its old and picturesque houses delighted him, but it was on reaching the quays on the banks of the Seine, and while crossing the Pont-Neuf, that Paris was displayed to him in all its marvellous beauty. Notre-Dame, the Châtelet, the Louvre, the Tuileries, and a multitude of less important structures, then burst upon his gaze, filling him with admiration. But he had no time to dwell upon the picture. Passing the Collège de Quatre Nations, and along the Quai de Theatins, the party soon reached the Rue de Bourbon, and aligned at the Hôtel des Etrangers.

IX.

HOW JACK AND TOM WERE GRACIOUSLY RECEIVED BY THE DUC DE MONTBAZON.

IN the course of the evening Graham brought word that some brilliant fêtes were just then taking place at court, whereupon Jack expressed a strong desire to be present at one of them on the following day. Tom declared he saw no difficulty in the matter, and undertook to obtain admission to the Louvre. However, as they were unprovided with fitting attire, a messenger was at once despatched to M. Marolles, the court tailor, who presently repaired to the hotel, and received an order for three magnificent suits. Marolles not only undertook to furnish these habiliments at an early hour on the morrow, but to provide the three gentlemen with all else they might require to make a befitting appearance at the royal fête. Moreover, he promised to bring M. Gaston, the court perruquier, with a good choice of periwigs à la mode de la cour. This important matter arranged, Jack and Tom retired to recruit themselves after the fatigues of the day, and prepare for the festivities of the morrow.

When they arose next morning, they found Marolles and Gaston in attendance. Their dresses became them to admiration—at least, Marolles declared so—and Gaston was quite satisfied with the sit of their perukes—the latter, it may be mentioned in passing, had been ordered in some degree to disguise their features.

At a later hour in the morning, arrayed in their splendid habiliments, and wearing their flowing perukes, Jack and Tom, attended by Graham, who was equally richly attired, drove in a coach to the Louvre, and were set down in the great court.

On entering the palace, their distinguished appearance

satisfied the ushers that they were persons of importance, and they were at once admitted to the cabinet of the Duc de Montbazon, grand chamberlain to the queen, by whom the royal fêtes were superintended. The duke, who was a very formal personage, received them with ceremonious politeness. They were presented to him as the Messieurs Smith, three Englishmen who were passing through Paris to Madrid, and they noticed that the duke smiled slightly when this announcement was made.

"We are quite aware, M. le Duc," said Tom, "that we ought to have been presented to you by our ambassador, but as time presses, and we have only a single day in Paris, we have ventured to come direct to you, being inflamed with a most ardent desire to witness the royal fête, which we are told is to be given this evening."

"I will do all in my power to oblige you, messieurs," returned Montbazon, in the most gracious manner possible. "To-day, as you may possibly be aware, a grand banquet is given by the queen-mother, Marie de Médicis, to his majesty and the principal persons of the court. The banquet will be followed by a superb allegorical ballet, which will take place in the grand salle de danse; and in this ballet, besides the fairest of the court dames, the Princess Henriette Marie and my gracious mistress, our lovely young queen, will dance."

"It is chiefly to behold your young queen, Anne of Austria, of whose beauty we have heard such ravishing descriptions, that we desire to witness this ballet, M. le Duc," remarked Jack.

"I need scarcely tell you, messieurs," said Montbazon, "that, as conductor of the royal fêtes, I have been compelled to refuse a vast number of applications from members—some of them distinguished members—of the court to be present at this ballet, but I am disposed to make an exception in your favour. As strangers, the king will feel that you have a greater claim upon his hospitality than his own subjects possess. In his majesty's name, therefore, I invite you, messieurs, to the banquet, and to the ballet."

"You overwhelm us with obligation, M. le Duc," replied Jack. "Gratified as we are by the invitation, we can scarcely accept it, as we feel that you are straining courtesy too far."

"Nay, do not stand on ceremony, messieurs," replied Montbazon. "I should be very sorry that you missed these fêtes, and as your stay in Paris is limited to a single day, you cannot have another opportunity. I myself will see you well placed."

"We have no rank to entitle us to any but the lowest place," observed Tom. "Indeed, we ought not to sit down among the court nobility."

A singular smile played upon the duke's countenance, and he said, with some significance, "Be assured I will assign you proper places, messieurs."

Just then an usher entered, and informed the grand chamberlain that the English ambassador was without, and craved an audience.

"This is lucky!" exclaimed Montbazon. "It will spare you the necessity of waiting upon Sir Edward Herbert."

"One word, M. le Duc," said Jack. "I must pray you not to admit him."

"Not admit him!" cried the duke, feigning surprise. "Wherefore not?"

"You shall know as soon as we are alone," rejoined the other.

"Entreat his excellency to excuse me for a moment," said Montbazon to the usher. "I shall soon be disengaged."

"It is right, M. le Duc," said Charles, as soon as they were alone, "that you should know who we are; but in making the disclosure, I must throw myself upon your generosity to keep the matter secret."

"It is perfectly safe in my hands, prince," replied Montbazon, rising and bowing profoundly. "I knew you and my lord of Buckingham the moment you entered. Marolles informed me you had sent for him, and I was, therefore, prepared for this visit. You look surprised, but

I received information of your arrival in Paris last night from the lieutenant-general of police, to whom it was communicated."

"Is the king aware of my arrival?" inquired Charles.

"Not as yet," replied the duke. "I intended to surprise him, but if it is really your highness's desire to pass through Paris without a public appearance at court, I will not mention the matter to his majesty till after your departure."

"You will do me an immense favour, for which I shall ever feel grateful, M. le Duc," rejoined Charles. "If presented to his majesty, I must tarry here for some days, and I am bound on an expedition of the utmost urgency——"

"To Spain," remarked Montbazon, with a smile. "I understand. Your highness may rest easy, I will not thwart your project, but will facilitate your departure. Your ambassador is in the ante-chamber, and will be sure to see you as you go out. Let me beg of you, therefore, to pass forth this way."

So saying, he opened a side-door communicating with a private staircase, through which Charles and his companions, with a renewed expression of their gratitude, made an **exit**.

X.

HOW JACK AND TOM DROVE ABOUT PARIS, AND WHAT THEY SAW
DURING THE DRIVE.

DETERMINED to make the most of their time Charles and his companions spent several hours in driving about Paris, noting every object of interest that came under their observation,—palaces, hotels of the nobility, ancient habitations, theatres, churches, fortresses, prisons, hospitals, colleges, bridges, and public edifices of all kinds. They tracked the Rue Saint Honoré and Rue Saint Antoine from end to end, visited a multitude of churches and convents by the way, strolled about the Place Royale, and spent some time in contemplating the Bastille. Surrounded by a deep moat, approached only by a drawbridge, bristling with ordnance, and flanked by towers, this terrible state prison and fortress seemed almost a counterpart of the Tower of London, though it wanted the majesty of the latter structure.

"'Tis a stern and sullen pile, the Bastille," observed Charles, "and the heart aches when one thinks of the multitude of captives confined within it."

"Louis XIII. would say the same thing of the Tower, if he chanced to behold it," rejoined Buckingham.

"Possibly he might," remarked Charles, gloomily "And yet the Tower never affected me so profoundly."

"And no doubt his most Christian Majesty makes light of the Bastille," said Buckingham, "and thinks it the finest building in his fair city of Paris, as it certainly is the most useful. Where else could he safely lodge so many state offenders, and prevent them from uttering a complaint? Would to Heaven it were as easy for our dear dad and gossip to send a traitor to the Tower as it is for Louis to incarcerate one in the Bastille! The *lettre de cachet* is an admirable invention.

No accusation—no trial—secret arrest and secret imprisonment. With the *lettre de cachet* and the Bastille, a monarch or his minister may play the despot with impunity. The time may come when your highness may enjoy the truly regal privilege of the *lettre de cachet*.”

“Any attempt to exercise such arbitrary power in England would cause a revolution,” observed Charles. “But you ever jest with the most serious subjects, Tom. Let us leave this moody pile. The sight of it makes me melancholy.”

“Whither shall we go?” cried Buckingham. “Yonder is the *Porte Saint Antoine*. Suppose we pass through it, and drive outside the walls to the *Porte Saint Martin*? Your highness will then have seen all Paris.”

“Not quite all, Tom,” returned Charles, “but enough to convince me that it is a wondrously beautiful city, far more picturesque than London, and yet, I own, I like London best.”

“’Twould be strange if you did not,” remarked Buckingham. “But we must embellish London, and make it surpass Paris in beauty.”

“London, in my opinion, needs no embellishment,” said Graham. “The Thames is a far finer river than the Seine; London Bridge is handsomer than the *Pont Neuf*; Whitehall is a nobler palace than the Louvre; Saint Paul’s surpasses *Notre-Dame* in grandeur; and we are all agreed that the Tower is infinitely more majestic than the Bastille.”

“You are right, Dick,” observed Charles. “And yet, as a whole, Paris is a finer city than London.”

“I am loth to admit so much,” said Graham. “But your highness is a better judge than I am, and I must needs defer to your opinion. Unquestionably, the habitations here are loftier than with us.”

“And more picturesque,” said Charles. “We have no street like the *Rue Saint Antoine*, which we have just traversed.”

“None so long, I own,” rejoined Graham. “But give me the Strand, or Fleet-street.”

"What say you to the Samaritaine on the Pont Neuf?" demanded Buckingham.

"A mere mechanical toy," replied Graham; "quaint and pretty enough, but Saint Dunstan's clock is better worth seeing."

"Have you no admiration for the Tuileries?" said Buckingham.

"The palace is not entirely to my taste," returned Graham. "I like Saint James's better."

"You are as void of taste as you are obstinate, Dick," observed Charles, laughing. "But whatever I may think of the beauties of this city—and manifold they are—rest assured I would not exchange London for it."

While this conversation took place, they passed through the Porte Saint Antoine, and pursuing a broad road laid out on the top of the counterscarp, skirted the old walls until they came to the Porte Saint Martin, when they again entered the city, and drove direct to their hotel in the Rue de Bourbon.

While the prince and his companions were thus employing their time, Sir Francis Cottington and Endymion Porter were fully occupied in preparations for the journey to be undertaken next day. Their first business was to despatch a courier to King James, with a letter apprising his majesty of the safe arrival of the prince and Buckingham in Paris. This done, they proceeded to a banker in the Rue des Lombards, where they obtained gold for some of the bills of exchange with which they were furnished; and being thus amply provided with funds, as well for the journey as for immediate requirement, they procured, in pursuance of the orders they had received, two handsome riding-suits for the prince and Buckingham. Moreover, having suffered grievously from the neglect of due provision in this respect during their ride from Boulogne to Paris, they purchased well-padded saddles for the whole party, and took care that the holsters were furnished with pistols. Pistols also were provided for the belt, and musquetoons for the shoulder, so that henceforth the travellers would

be armed to the teeth, and able, it was thought, to resist any attack by robbers that might be made on them during the journey.

"You have made due provision for our comfort as well as for our security, gentlemen," observed Charles, as he examined these articles, which were laid out for his inspection. "I am particularly glad to see these easy saddles. We could scarce have got to Madrid without them."

"And these laced riding-habits, broad-leaved grey hats, and funnel-topped boots, will transform us into French cavaliers in a trice," cried Buckingham. "We have only to don these habiliments, and wear our moustaches en croc, and the metamorphosis will be complete."

"These riding-dresses are the counterpart of those worn by his majesty Louis XIII. while hunting, my good lord," replied Cottington.

"They are handsome enough for any monarch in Christendom," cried Buckingham. "But, thus attired, we shall be compelled to change our designation. We can be Smiths no longer."

"That must not be," returned Charles. "As John Smith I have started on the expedition, and John Smith I will continue till I reach Madrid."

"And I of course shall remain brother Tom," said Buckingham. "After all, one English name is as good as another in France, and it signifies little what we are called."

At this juncture, a servant entered to say that a messenger from the Duc de Montbazou was without, and shortly afterwards a well-dressed personage was shown into the room. He announced himself as M. Chevilly, confidential valet to the duke, and thus declared his mission:

"Highness," he said, making a profound obeisance to the prince, "I have been sent by the Duc de Montbazou to attend upon you, and upon the noble marquis, if you will deign to employ me. My master deeply regrets that he is unable personally to attend upon your high-

ness, but he has given me ample instructions. He has charged me to say that he will send his own carriage to convey you to the Luxembourg, where the banquet given by her majesty the queen-mother takes place. If permitted, I shall have the supreme honour of attending your highness to the palace, and after the banquet will conduct you to the Louvre, where you will witness the grand ballet."

"The duke is, indeed, most considerate," said Charles "I fear I may put him to some inconvenience."

"My master is anxious to anticipate your wishes," returned Chevilly. "If I understand aright, your highness designs to start at an early hour to-morrow morning for Spain. May I venture to ask whether any of your gentlemen have taken the trouble to order post-horses?"

"Not as yet," returned Cottington. "We await his highness's orders. But there can be no difficulty about the matter."

"Pardon me, monseigneur," said Chevilly. "There is great difficulty, as you would have found, had you made application. Without my master's intervention you would have had no post-horses."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Buckingham. "That would have been awkward. But why should we be refused?"

"Because the lieutenant-general of police had interdicted your departure till his majesty's pleasure respecting you should be ascertained, my lord," rejoined Chevilly. "My master, however, has made it his business to remove the obstacle, and, I rejoice to say, has succeeded. Here is an order for the horses, countersigned by the head of the police," he added, delivering it to Cottington. "You can start at any hour you deem proper."

"Another great obligation I am under to the duke," observed Charles.

"A mere trifle," said Chevilly. "In an hour the carriage will be here to convey you to the Luxembourg. I will await your highness's further orders without."

And with a profound bow he withdrew.

Shortly afterwards, Charles, with Buckingham and Graham, retired to their respective chambers, and proceeded to make their toilettes with great care.

XI.

HOW JACK AND TOM DINED AT THE LUXEMBOURG; AND HOW THEY WERE PRESENTED TO QUEEN MARIE DE MÉDICIS.

PUNCTUALLY at the time appointed, the magnificent equipage belonging to the Duc de Montbazou entered the court-yard of the hotel, and Charles, with Buckingham and Graham, being ceremoniously conducted to it by Chevilly, were driven to the Luxembourg. Chevilly went with them, posted on the marche-pied.

The palace of the Luxembourg—still one of the chief ornaments of the French capital—was at this time in all its freshness and splendour, having only been completed a few years previously by Marie de Médicis, who spent an enormous sum upon its construction, and in its internal embellishment. Modelled upon the Palazzo Pitti at Florence, it possessed charming gardens laid out in the Italian style, and ornamented with marble fountains and statues.

On arriving at the palace, the carriage containing Charles and his companions passed through the gateway into the grand court, which was filled at the time with splendid equipages. On alighting, our travellers entered a spacious vestibule, thronged with gentlemen ushers, pages, valets, and musketeers of the royal guard. Here they were met by Chevilly, who preceded them up a noble staircase, and led them along a magnificent corridor, adorned with antique statues and paintings by the first Italian masters.

Eventually, the party were ushered into a large and

gorgeously furnished room, in which were assembled the guests. The company, as may be supposed, consisted of the élite of the French nobility, and they were all as much distinguished by aristocratic deportment and refinement of manner as by splendour of apparel.

Montbazon had taken care to make it known that three Englishmen had been invited to the banquet, and when Charles and his companions made their appearance, it was at once understood they must be the persons referred to by the duke. But who were they? This was a question that no one could answer, and Montbazon not being present at the moment, the general curiosity remained unsatisfied. That they were persons of high rank none doubted, but no one—not even the ushers—had heard their titles.

Meanwhile, Charles and his companions, not unconscious of the curiosity they excited, and secretly amused by it, had halted, and remained standing at some little distance from the rest of the company. The remarkable dignity of the prince's deportment, and the noble character of his features, drew all eyes towards him, while Buckingham's stately figure and haughty manner made him also a mark for general observation. There were some fair observers, however, who thought Sir Richard Graham the handsomest of the three.

Charles seemed perfectly indifferent to the effect which he produced upon the assemblage, and though he did not assume any air of superiority, it was impossible that he could disguise his habitual majesty of deportment. Buckingham, accustomed to outshine all the members of his own court by the splendour of his apparel and the magnificence of his ornaments, was mortified to find himself eclipsed by several of the nobles on the present occasion, and lamented the want of his diamond girdle and ropes of pearls. He looked around proudly, as was his wont at Whitehall, and offended some of the high-spirited young nobles by his supercilious air.

His haughty glance was still ranging over the courtly throng, when large folding-doors at the upper end of

the room were thrown open, and a gentleman usher, attended by a number of pages dressed in white satin, announced their majesties the king and queen.

Preceded by the Duc de Montbazon, bearing his wand of office, and walking backwards, the young monarch then came forth, leading the queen-mother by the hand. Louis XIII. was of slight figure, but well proportioned, with handsome features and fine eyes. His pourpoint and mantle were of crimson damask, embroidered with gold and enriched with precious stones, and round his neck he wore a chain with the order of the Toison d'Or. His majesty seemed out of health. He walked feebly, and his countenance bore traces of suffering.

Marie de Médicis, who still retained much of her beauty, had set off her noble person to the utmost advantage. The stomacher of her dark satin dress blazed with diamonds and rubies. A carcanet of pearls encircled her still snowy throat, and wreaths of pearls adorned her tresses, which had lost none of their raven hue. Her eyes were lustrous, her brow smooth as marble, and her carriage majestic and imperious.

On the appearance of the royal party, the company immediately drew aside to allow them passage, and profound reverences were made on all sides. These were very graciously acknowledged by the queen-mother, and somewhat coldly by her royal son, who scarcely deigned to look around.

Charles and his companions escaped the king's notice, but not that of Marie de Médicis, who appeared much struck by their appearance, and vouchsafed them a gracious smile. Little did Louis XIII. deem that within a few paces of him stood the heir to the throne of a kingdom powerful as his own—a prince with whom he was destined to be allied—or he might have bestowed something more than a heedless glance upon him.

However, though both were objects of interest to him, it was neither with the king nor the queen-mother that Charles was now occupied. His attention was engrossed by the lovely young queen who followed them.

Anne of Austria was then about twenty-four, and consequently in the full *éclat* of her beauty. Her figure was exquisite, and her movements combined Castilian dignity with Andalusian grace. In stature she was somewhat below the ordinary female standard, but this circumstance detracted nothing from the effect she produced. Her feet and hands were the smallest and most beautiful imaginable, and her waist taper, yet admirably rounded. Her features, lovely in expression as in form, were lighted up by large dark eyes beaming with mingled fire and tenderness. Her nose was small, and, judged by classic rule, might have been termed too flat, but it was charming nevertheless, as was her little mouth, the under lip of which protruded beyond its roseate partner, proclaiming her a true daughter of the house of Austria. Her rich brown locks were wreathed with diamonds, and gathered in crisp little curls, as was then the mode, upon her white open brow. Her dress was of yellow damask, the body being covered with twisted fringes of diamonds and precious stones. In her right hand she carried a Spanish fan, and her left hand was accorded to Cardinal Richelieu, who had the honour of conducting her to the banquet.

The wondrous beauty of the young queen transcended any ideas that Charles and Buckingham had formed of it, and the latter was perfectly dazzled, her charms kindling an instantaneous flame in his breast.

On her part, Anne of Austria had remarked both Buckingham and the prince, and she was not unconscious of the ardent glance of admiration which the former had dared to fix upon her. But for this glance, which called the blood to her cheek, she might have drawn Richelieu's attention to the strangers, and inquired their names.

"How lovely the queen is," whispered Charles to his favourite.

"She is perfection," rejoined Buckingham; "and if the Infanta Maria is only equally lovely, as I doubt not she must be, your highness will be the happiest of men."

"Fair as the queen is, they say Louis is insensible

to her charms, and neglects her for Madame de Chevreuse," remarked Charles. "Looking on her, I cannot believe the scandal."

"If she be so neglected," rejoined Buckingham, breathing hard, "his majesty merits the fate of a careless husband. But see! who comes next? One need not be told that it is the Princess Henriette Marie. Her beauty pales beside that of Anne of Austria."

"Hum! I am not sure of that," rejoined Charles. "They are different in style, but both are beautiful."

The fair young princess, who was now led past them by the Duc de Guise, was not yet fifteen, and consequently her personal charms could not be fully developed. But there was the promise of extraordinary beauty about her; and her magnificent black eyes, luxuriant black tresses, dark glowing cheeks, coral lips, and pearly teeth, showed what her charms would be when arrived at maturity. Henriette Marie inherited all her mother's beauty, and, indeed, was so like her mother, that, at Florence, she might have passed for a daughter of the house of Médicis.

As the princess moved gracefully along under the conduct, as we have said, of the Duc de Guise, her eyes encountered those of Charles, which were fixed upon her. There was nothing to alarm her, as there had been in Buckingham's bold gaze at the queen, but there was something in the look that vibrated to her heart, and awakened an emotion such as she had never previously experienced. A kind of fascination was exercised over her, and she could not withdraw her gaze from the dark handsome countenance that enthralled it. A strange presentiment crossed her, and seemed to announce that her future fate was in some way connected with the person she beheld.

"That gentleman must be a stranger," she remarked, in a low voice, to the Duc de Guise. "I do not remember to have seen him before."

"I know not who he is," replied the duke, regarding

Charles with surprise. "But I will inquire anon, and inform you."

Charles's eyes followed the princess as she glided gracefully along, and it would almost seem that she felt their influence, for she turned her head slightly, and bestowed a second glance upon him.

"A merveille!" exclaimed Buckingham. "You have evidently created an interest in the bosom of the fair Henriette Marie, and if a corresponding impression has been produced upon your highness, we had better stay where we are, instead of prosecuting our journey to Madrid."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Charles. "The princess is very beautiful, I admit—very captivating—but I cannot swerve from my allegiance to the Infanta. I begin to think we have run great hazard of discovery in attending this banquet. Many inquiring looks have been fixed upon us."

"Amongst others, those of the princess," replied Buckingham. "She has evidently been trying to ascertain who your highness may be, but I hope she will not learn the truth till we have left Paris, or there will be considerable risk of our detention. If she is as clever as she is beautiful, she will not get such a prize escape her. Heaven grant she display not too much interest in you to the Duc de Montbazon, or he may counter-order the post-horses."

"We were unwise to come here," observed Charles, gravely.

"That I feel," replied Buckingham. "Having lost my heart to the lovely queen, I shall be tormented evermore with a hopeless passion. But being here, we must go through with it. Retreat is now impossible."

Meanwhile the guests marched on. Next after the Princess Henriette Marie came her younger brother, Gaston de France, Duc d'Orléans, conducting Mademoiselle de Montpensier, whom he subsequently espoused.

Monsieur, as the Duc d'Orléans was styled, was presumptive heir to the throne, the king being as yet without issue by his union with Anne of Austria. Of an

ambitious nature, and indisposed to wait the due course of events, Gaston was ever conspiring against his royal brother, but his designs were invariably baffled by the vigilance of Richelieu, who surrounded him with spies, and received intelligence of all his machinations.

The Duc d'Orléans was a prince of very noble presence, and looked more robust than the king, though his features were not so handsome as those of Louis XIII. He was his mother's favourite son, and as she would gladly have seen him on the throne she secretly supported his schemes, and by so doing excited the suspicion of Richelieu and the king. Into these intrigues, however, we need not enter, as they have no relation to our story. On the present occasion Gaston was splendidly attired, and made a very magnificent appearance. Aware that he secretly aspired to the throne, Charles and Buckingham regarded him with curiosity: but they sought in vain to read his character in his looks. He was a profound dissembler, and his visage was a mask to hide his thoughts. The Duc d'Orléans and Mademoiselle de Montpensier were succeeded by a long train, comprising, as we have said, the most distinguished personages of the court, but it was not till the whole of these had passed by that Charles and his companions fell into the line. A host of pages and valets, amongst whom came Chevilly, brought up the rear.

"This flagrant violation of etiquette in your highness's case would drive Sir John Finett distracted, if he were to hear of it. And the Duc de Montbazou must be equally annoyed," remarked Graham to the prince.

"It gives me not the slightest concern," rejoined Charles. "In reality, there is no violation of etiquette whatever, since I am only known as Jack Smith."

Passing through an ante-room lined with attendants in rich liveries, the guests were ushered into the banquetting-hall—a noble apartment, with a ceiling painted with frescoes, and walls hung with tapestry, not of sombre hue and design, but light and pleasing to the eye, representing pastoral scenes and flowers. A flourish of

trumpets was sounded as the royal party entered the banqueting-chamber.

At the upper end of the table there was a dais, at which the queen-mother sat beneath a canopy of state, with the royal party on either side of her. These august personages were served only by nobles, who esteemed it a proud distinction to be so employed.

In all respects the banquet was regal. The plate was superb, the meats of the choicest kind, the wines varied and exquisite. Officers were stationed at short intervals, and numberless attendants did their duty most efficiently. Though placed among the inferior guests, and at the lower end of the board, Charles and his companions were well satisfied with their position, inasmuch as they were free from observation themselves, and had a full view of the royal party at the upper table.

Buckingham ate little, though tempted by many delicacies, but feasted his eyes on the charms of the queen, and Charles's gaze took the same direction, though, sooth to say, he looked quite at much at the Princess Henriette Marie as at Anne of Austria. Graham was by no means indifferent to the splendour of the scene, and looked frequently towards the dais, but he did not allow his curiosity to interfere with his enjoyment of the dainties set before him.

Our three travellers sat together, with the prince in the midst, and their haughty reserve and taciturnity effectually isolated them from their neighbours, who regarded them with the dislike which Englishmen at all times have contrived to inspire among their Gallic neighbours. They were sedulously attended upon by Chevilly, who stood behind them during the repast.

Though splendid and profuse, the banquet did not occupy much more than an hour. It was terminated by a marshal, who proclaimed in a loud voice from the dais that her majesty the queen-mother drank to her guests, whereupon all the company arose and bowed towards the upper table in acknowledgment of the honour done them. After this, the royal party retired—the cere-

monies observed at their departure being similar to those which had marked their entrance. The guests followed in the same order as before, and returned to the grand saloon.

On entering this room, Charles and Buckingham looked in vain for Anne of Austria and the young princess. They had already set out for the Louvre to prepare for the ballet, and the king and the rest of the royal party speedily followed them.

Marie de Médicis, however, felt constrained to stay with her guests, and it was at this juncture that the Duc de Montbazon, who had not hitherto found an opportunity of addressing the prince and his companions, approached them, and stated, with a significant smile, that her majesty the queen-mother had commanded him to present them to her.

"Her majesty has remarked your presence, prince," he added, in a low voice, "and has made particular inquiries about your highness and my Lord of Buckingham. I told her you were the Messieurs Smith, but she would not be satisfied with that description—neither would the queen nor the Princess Henriette Marie. So I was compelled to avow the truth to them, and disclose your real rank."

"How, M. le Duc?" exclaimed Charles, with a look of displeasure. "You promised to preserve my secret."

"It is perfectly safe with these royal ladies, prince," rejoined Montbazon. "In fact, no option was left me. Had I not confessed, discovery must infallibly have ensued. Now you are safe. It is not strange that you have escaped the king's notice, for his majesty rarely troubles himself about strangers, but it is lucky that Cardinal Richelieu did not remark you."

"Under these circumstances, M. le Duc, will it be prudent to proceed to the Louvre?" said Charles.

"I see no danger whatever, your highness," returned Montbazon; "and I may be permitted to add, that the queen and the Princess Henriette Marie will be greatly disappointed if you are not present at the ballet. I told

them of the ardent desire you had evinced to behold it."

"It would be inconsistent with your highness's chivalrous character to retire now," observed Buckingham.

"After what the Duc de Montbazon has just said, I should never dream of retiring," rejoined Charles.

"I am delighted to hear it," said Montbazon. "Chevilly shall place masks in the carriage, and you can wear them in the ball-room, so there will be small chance of discovery. But now allow me to conduct you to her majesty."

Marie de Médicis was seated on a fauteuil, surrounded by a number of lords and ladies, but as Montbazon approached, she motioned her entourage to withdraw, and most graciously received the prince and his companions on their presentation.

"I was little aware whom I had the honour of entertaining, prince," she observed to Charles; "but I need not say how much indebted I am to the Duc de Montbazon for enabling me to exercise some slight hospitality towards your highness and the Marquis of Buckingham. I am sorry your stay in Paris is so short, but I presume there is more attraction in Madrid, whither I understand you are going."

"I have found Paris so charming, that I greatly regret leaving it, madame," replied Charles. "And my regrets will not be diminished by the glimpse I have been permitted to enjoy of your brilliant court."

"It is your own fault, prince, that you are restricted to a mere glimpse," rejoined Marie de Médicis. "Can I not offer you sufficient temptation to remain here?—if but for a week. Will you not delay your journey to Madrid for that time?"

"Impossible, madame," replied Charles. "Feeling I can place confidence in your majesty, I will at once own that secrecy and despatch are indispensable to the success of the expedition I have undertaken. I ought not to be here this evening, but I could not resist the desire

to behold your court, and the Duc de Montbazon kindly consented to gratify me."

"Montbazon did well," rejoined Marie de Médicis. "Since you are resolved to go, prince, I shall not press you further. Doubtless you are engaged on some romantic enterprise," she added, with a smile; "and I would not, on any account, interfere with it. You are said to be the most chivalrous prince in Europe, and the hazardous journey you have undertaken proves you deserve the title. What shall I say of you, my Lord of Buckingham, except that you are a worthy companion of the prince?"

"I am afraid your majesty will look upon us as two crazy knight-errants," rejoined Buckingham. "Since I have had the honour to be your guest, I have been so enchanted with what I have seen, that I begin to view our expedition in a different light, and should not be sorry if you could induce his highness to forego it."

"I fear the attempt would be fruitless," said Marie de Médicis; "but perhaps the prince may change his mind before the end of the evening. I am now going to the Louvre, and shall expect to see you there at the ballet. Au revoir."

On this, Charles and his companions retired, and the queen-mother arising, with a gracious salutation to those around her quitted the apartment, attended by her ladies of honour and by the Duc de Montbazon, and entered her carriage.

Her guests followed her example, and in less than an hour the whole of the company were transferred from the palace of the Luxembourg to that of the Louvre.

XII

HOW JACK AND TOM WITNESSED A GRAND BALLET AT THE LOUVRE;
AND HOW TOM DANCED A SARABAND WITH ANNE OF AUSTRIA, AND
JACK DANCED THE PAVANE WITH THE PRINCESS HENRIETTE MARIE.

ACCUSTOMED as they were to pomp and splendour, and familiar with every possible display of regal magnificence, it was not without admiration almost amounting to wonder that Charles and his companions passed through the gorgeous halls of the Louvre, now brilliantly illuminated, and filled with richly-attired guests.

On this occasion the superb suite of apartments, surpassing in size and splendour those of any other palace, were thrown open, and at no time had a more numerous or a more distinguished assemblage been collected within them. All that the court of France, then the most elegant and refined as well as the most aristocratic in Europe, could boast in the way of nobility and high birth was present. The chief beauties and the most accomplished gallants belonging to a court maintained by a young king and a lovely queen were at the Louvre that night, and Charles and Buckingham were free to admit that they had never seen so many charming dames and noble-looking cavaliers as were now met together. Something of this effect might be owing to the gorgeous dresses, and Buckingham more than ever regretted the want of his own splendid habiliments and diamonds.

Moving on with the glittering stream, Charles and his companions passed through many gorgeous rooms, until they reached a noble hall called the "Salle Neuve de la Reine." At the doors of this grand saloon, in which the ballet was about to take place, numerous gentlemen ushers and pages were stationed, and before entering it the prince and his companions put on their masks,

Anne of Austria, like most of her country-women, was passionately fond of dancing, and excelled in the art, and the king, though caring little for the amusement, was willing to gratify her tastes. Balls and masquerades, therefore, were of frequent occurrence at the Louvre, greatly to the delight of the younger members of the court.

The Salle Neuve de la Reine, in which these entertainments usually took place, was a spacious and lofty apartment, admirably adapted to the purpose, as it allowed ample space for the movements of a vast number of couples. The panels were covered with sky-blue satin, and the numerous mirrors were festooned with flowers. At one side there was an orchestra, filled by the best musicians from the Grand Opera. Viewed from the doors by which the company entered, this splendid saloon presented the most charming coup d'œil imaginable. The atmosphere was loaded with perfumes, which almost intoxicated the senses. At the upper end of the room was a canopy, beneath which, on raised fauteuils, sat Marie de Médicis, Anne of Austria, and the Princess Henriette Marie, surrounded by a bevy of court dames, but neither the king nor Monsieur, nor any other grand seigneur, except the Duc de Montbazon, stood near them.

Just as Charles and his companions entered the saloon, the grand allegorical ballet was about to commence. A lively prelude was played by the orchestra, and, at its close, the side-doors communicating with another apartment flew open, and a band of Olympian divinities, attended by minstrels clashing cymbals, and playing on the lyre and the lute, swept into the hall, and taking up a position in its centre, proceeded to execute a classic dance. Personated by some of the loveliest dames and damsels of the court, and robed in gauzy drapery that displayed their symmetry of limb to perfection, these goddesses ravished the hearts of the beholders, and Juno, Pallas, and Venus looked so lovely, that Buckingham declared he should be as much puzzled as Paris himself

if called upon to decide which was the fairest. Besides the principal dancers, there was a numerous corps de ballet, composed of nymphs, shepherds, and fauns, and this troop mingled with the dance at intervals, and heightened its effect. The grace and beauty of the performers in the ballet would have sufficed to ensure its success; but it was admirably contrived, and presented a series of exquisite classical pictures. The group with which the dance closed was charmingly conceived, and formed so enchanting a picture, that the spectators were transported with delight, and could scarcely repress their enthusiasm. As it was, a murmur of admiration pervaded the assemblage.

When this charming picture was broken up, Juno, accompanied by the two other goddesses, stepped towards the seats occupied by Marie de Médicis and Anne of Austria, and bending before their majesties, thus addressed them:

Je ne suis plus cette Junon
Pleine de gloire et de renom ;
Pour deux grandes princesses
Je perds ma royauté :
L'une a fait le plus grand des rois ;
L'autre le tient dessous ses lois
Pour vous, grandes princesses,
Je perds ma royauté.

This complimentary address was most graciously received by both queens, and obtained a flattering response from Marie de Médicis.

Venus then presented a golden apple to Henriette Marie, and Pallas laid her spear and shield at the princess's feet. This done, the Olympian troop retired, and shortly afterwards the three royal ladies arose and retired to an ante-chamber.

Presently, the orchestra again struck up, and the ball commenced with a coranto, in which a vast number of couples took part. Then followed a bransle, and while this was going on, the Duc de Montbazon made his way to Charles and his companions, and besought them to follow him,

As soon as they were out of the crowd, Montbazon said to the prince, "The queen is about to dance a sara-band with the Princess Henriette Marie, the Comtesse de la Torre, and the Comtesse Monteleone, and it is her majesty's desire that your highness and my lord of Buckingham take part in the dance."

"I am fully sensible of the honour intended me, M. le Duc," replied Charles, "but I must pray you to make my excuses to the queen."

"I dare not deliver such an answer, prince," rejoined Montbazon. "Her majesty is not accustomed to refusal. I must entreat you to make your excuses in person. Do you, my lord," he added to Buckingham, "decline the proffered honour?"

"Decline it! Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Buckingham. "I am entirely at her majesty's disposal—in this as in all other matters."

Montbazon then conducted Charles and his companions to the ante-room, whither the two queens had retired. Here they found Marie de Médicis, with four ladies attired in magnificent Spanish dresses, each of different coloured silk, but all richly embroidered with fringes of gold, and ornamented with knots of ribands. Though these ladies were masked, it was not difficult to distinguish in two of them the queen and the princess.

Anne of Austria wore a yellow satin basquina, which suited her exquisite figure to perfection, and Henriette Marie was attired in a blush-coloured dress of the same material and make, which became her equally well. The Comtesse de Torre and the Comtesse Monteleone were dressed respectively in white and blue.

On entering the room, Montbazon advanced to the queen and said a few words to her, on hearing which he manifested her disappointment by a slight impatient gesture, but desired him to bring forward the prince and his companions. This was done, and they were presented, but under what designations Charles did not hear.

"The Duc de Montbazon tells me prince," said Anne

of Austria, in a slight tone of pique, "that you are unwilling to dance with me."

"Not unwilling, madame," replied Charles, "but unable. I do not dance the saraband."

"It is the easiest dance imaginable," said the queen. "I wish you would try it."

"I dare not, madame," returned Charles. "I should only be an embarrassment to your majesty, and incur the ridicule of the company."

"Have courage and make the attempt, prince," cried Henriette Marie. "We will take care you shall make no mistake."

"Even with this encouragement I will not venture," returned Charles. "I shall not rise in your opinion if I confess that I care little for lively figures, and confine myself to the pavane and pazzameno."

"The pavane is my favourite dance," cried the princess.

"Were it given, I would ask to be your partner," said Charles, gallantly.

"The princess will be charmed to dance with you," said Marie de Médicis, answering for her daughter. "After the saraband we will have a pavane."

"The Duc de Montbazon tells me you are going to Spain, prince," said Anne of Austria to Charles. "You ought, therefore, to learn our national dances."

"I will practise them at Madrid," returned the prince. "But though I am unskilled in the saraband, the Marquis of Buckingham is not. May I offer him as my substitute in the dance?"

"I have heard that my Lord of Buckingham is the most graceful dancer in Europe," remarked the queen. "I am curious to know whether the report is correct."

"I am sorry your majesty's expectations have been so highly raised, as I shall probably disappoint them," rejoined Buckingham. "I have a passion for dancing—and of all dances those of Spain delight me most. But I have never yet found a partner who could dance the saraband with me."

"Perhaps you will make the same complaint of me to-morrow," returned the queen.

"Impossible, madame," said Buckingham. "There is much more likelihood that I shall sink in your opinion."

"At all events, I promise to be lenient to your faults," rejoined Anne of Austria, smiling.

At this moment two young Spanish noblemen entered the room, and, on beholding them, the queen exclaimed that the party was complete, and calling for castanets, which were handed to all those about to dance the sara-band, bade the Duc de Montbazon order the band to strike up. The order was promptly obeyed, and while inspiring strains animated the whole assemblage, the four couples issued from the ante-room into the grand saloon. Graham had the distinguished honour of leading out the Princess Henriette Marie. All were masked, but as it was generally known that the queen and the princess were the chief dancers, great curiosity was excited.

In another moment the dancers had taken up their position, and as they threw themselves into a graceful preliminary attitude, every eye was fixed upon them. Nothing could be more exquisite than the posture assumed by the queen; it was beautiful, disdainful, and full of witchery. In another moment the merry rattle of castanets was heard, and the dance began.

Every movement of Anne of Austria was marked by the same grace that distinguished her in repose, and each turn of the dance served to reveal fresh beauties. Alternately she appeared to be excited by coquetry, agitated by gentle emotions of love, stirred by jealousy, and inflamed by rage. All these emotions were admirably portrayed, while the most difficult steps were executed with consummate ease and grace, and with inconceivable rapidity.

Buckingham well sustained his character as the best dancer of his day. So much grace and agility had never before been displayed in that hall by any devotee of Terpsichore.

If the Princess Henriette Marie did not display the

fire and passion exhibited by the queen, or possess in so high a degree as her majesty the poetry of motion, she acquitted herself charmingly, and delighted Charles, who watched her movements with admiration.

While the saraband was proceeding, the king entered the saloon, and his attention being drawn to Buckingham, he inquired who he was, and not being able to obtain the information from those around him, sent for the Duc de Montbazon.

"Who is the queen's partner?" demanded Louis, as the duke came up.

"An English nobleman, sire," replied Montbazon, without hesitation.

"An English nobleman!" exclaimed the king, surprised. "I concluded he was a Spaniard. He dances like a hidalgo. His name—and title?"

"I find it impossible to pronounce his name, sire, so you must excuse my attempting it, but he is a person of high rank."

"You are quite sure he is an Englishman, M. le Duc? He has not the air of one."

"I am quite sure of it, sire. There are two other Englishmen of rank in the ball-room—one of whom is dancing with the Princess Henriette Marie. They are merely passing through Paris on their way to Madrid, so I have not presented them to your majesty."

"Did I not deem it impossible, I should say that the person dancing with the queen must be the Marquis of Buckingham," observed the Comte d'Auvergne."

"Perhaps it is Buckingham," cried the Duc de Luynes.

"Bah!" exclaimed Louis. "The notion is absurd. You might as well assert the Prince of Wales is in the room."

"Just as well, sire,—one assertion is as likely as the other," said Montbazon. And anxious to avoid further explanation, he craved leave to withdraw.

By this time the saraband had concluded, and the dancers returned to the ante-room.

Anne of Austria seated herself on a fauteuil, but did

not dismiss Buckingham, who remained standing near her. Charles also had re-entered the room and approached the Princess Henriette Marie, who had taken a seat beside the queen-mother.

"You must be too much fatigued with your exertions to go through the pavane, princess," he observed.

"Dancing never fatigues me," she replied. "It is the pleasantest exercise one can take. I prefer it to hawking and hunting."

"I have ever preferred the tilt-yard to the ball-room," returned Charles; "but were I to remain long at this court my tastes would certainly undergo a change."

"You flatter me by saying so, prince. But I do not entirely believe you."

"Nay, it is truth," said Charles, gallantly.

"Here comes the Duc de Montbazon to announce that the pavane is about to begin," observed Marie de Médicis to her daughter. "Are you ready?"

"Quite," replied Henriette Marie. "I need no further repose."

And rising at the same time, she gave her hand to Charles, who led her into the saloon.

The appearance of the princess served as a signal to the orchestra, and the other couples being already placed, the dance at once commenced.

The stately character of the pavane, all the movements of which were slow and dignified, displayed Charles's majestic deportment to the utmost advantage, and he excited quite as much admiration as Buckingham had just done in the sparkling saraband.

That two such stars, each so brilliant, though differing in splendour, should appear at the same time, was sufficient to cause excitement, and general inquiries began to be made as to who the distinguished strangers could be. But though many conjectures were hazarded, all were wide of the mark.

In Henriette Marie the prince found a partner every way worthy of him. If she did not rival him in dignity, she equalled him in grace, and Charles himself, who had

been struck by the vivacity exhibited by the princess in the previous dance, was surprised by the stateliness she now displayed.

XIII.

HOW TOM FELL DESPERATELY IN LOVE.

MEANTIME, Buckingham remained in the ante-room, standing beside Anne of Austria, whose charms had already inspired him with a passion so violent, that he would have sacrificed the expedition on which he was bent, and the prince whom he attended, to obtain one favouring smile from her. Such was his overweening vanity, such the confidence he felt in his own irresistible powers of fascination, that he persuaded himself that the queen was not insensible to his admiration.

Careless of any consequences that might ensue should he be recognised, he had removed his mask. His looks breathed passion, and to every light word he uttered he sought to convey tender significance. Whether from coquetry, or that Buckingham's admiration was not disagreeable to her, certain it is that the queen did not reprove his audacity; and thus emboldened, he well-nigh forgot that many curious eyes were watching him, many ears listening to catch his words.

"And so you depart to-morrow for Madrid, my lord?" said the queen.

"The prince has so arranged it, madame," returned Buckingham, "but at a word from you, I stay."

"Nay, I cannot detain you," she rejoined. "Would I were going thither myself!" she added, with a sigh. "But I shall never more behold the city I love so well—never more set foot in the palace where the happiest hours of my life were spent."

"You surprise me, madame," cried Buckingham. "Is it possible that, occupying your present splendid

position as sovereign mistress of this brilliant court, you can have any regrets for the past?"

"Splendour of position is not everything, my lord," returned Anne of Austria. "I was happier as the Infanta than I am as Queen of France." Then feeling she had said too much, she added, "To you, my lord, I will venture to utter what I would confide to few others. My heart is in Spain—I am still a stranger here, and shall ever continue so. When you see my sister, the Infanta Maria, repeat my words to her."

"I will do whatever your majesty enjoins, though your regrets for Spain may make the Infanta loth to quit her native land."

"Ah! but your prince will reconcile her to the step—I am sure of it. I can read loyalty and devotion in his noble features. Where Charles Stuart gives his hand he will give his whole heart."

"You are an excellent physiognomist, madame," said Buckingham. "You have read the prince's character aright."

"Then my sister will be truly fortunate if she wins him. You say I am a good physiognomist, my lord, but your opinion will alter, I fear, when I declare that I see inconstancy written in your features as plainly as fidelity is stamped on those of the Prince of Wales."

"There your majesty is undoubtedly in error," returned Buckingham. "What you say may be true of the past, because till now my heart has never been touched. But the impression it has this night received is indelible as it is vivid."

And he threw a passionate glance at the queen, who cast down her eyes.

"Has not your majesty some slight token of regard that I may convey to the Infanta?" he inquired. "It would make me more welcome to her."

"I have nothing to send," replied the queen. "Had I known you were going to Madrid beforehand, I might have been prepared. Stay, take this," she added, giving

him a small, richly-chased vinaigrette, at which she had just breathed.

Buckingham took it rapturously.

"My sister will recollect it, and will know it comes from me," said Anne of Austria.

"I may not keep it, then?" rejoined Buckingham, imploringly. "'Twill be hard to part with it."

"I do not insist upon your delivering it," returned the queen. "But such a trifle is not worth keeping."

Buckingham's looks showed that he thought far otherwise.

Here it was well that this brief but dangerous interview was terminated by the return of Charles and Henriette Marie.

It was not without a severe pang that Buckingham tore himself away from one who had gained such a sudden and complete ascendancy over him. Fickle he had ever hitherto been in affairs of the heart, but he now submitted to the force of a great and overpowering passion. Nor could he liberate himself from it. Anne of Austria ever afterwards remained sovereign mistress of his heart, and his insane passion for her led him to commit acts of inconceivable folly.

Charles, as we have said, had returned with his fair partner to the ante-chamber, and on seeing them the queen signed to Henriette Marie to take a seat beside her. The princess obeyed, and as she sat down it was easy to perceive from her looks that she had enjoyed the dance, and Anne was making a remark to that effect, when the Duc de Montbazon came suddenly into the room, and made his way without ceremony to Charles, who was standing with Buckingham near the queen.

"What is the matter, M. le Duc?" cried Anne of Austria, seeing, from his manner, that something was wrong.

"The prince and his attendants must quit the Louvre immediately," returned Montbazon. "The king has been struck by their appearance, and has been making inquiries about them, but has failed in obtaining any

precise information. Unluckily, my son, the Comte de Rochefort, who has been in England, has made a guess not far wide of the truth, and his majesty's suspicions having become aroused, he will not rest till they are satisfied. Under these circumstances," he added, turning to Charles, "your highness's wisest course will be to depart at once."

"Where is the king?" demanded Anne of Austria, uneasily.

"Madame, he is in the ball-room at this moment," replied Montbazon; "but he is certain to come hither before long, and if he finds the prince and my lord of Buckingham with your majesty, it will be impossible to prevent a discovery; and then I much fear the meditated journey to Madrid will have to be postponed."

"That must not be," cried the queen. "Fly, prince," she added to Charles. "Stand upon no ceremony, but begone. Adieu, my lord," she said to Buckingham; "forget not my message to my sister."

And as he bent before her she extended her hand to him, and he fervently pressed it to his lips.

"Adieu, princess," said Charles to Henriette Marie; "I had hoped to dance the pazzameno with you, but that is now impossible."

"So it seems," replied Henriette Marie. "I am almost selfish enough to desire you might be detained. But since you must go, I wish you a safe and pleasant journey to Madrid. Adieu, prince."

Charles then made a profound obeisance to Marie de Médicis, as did Buckingham and Graham, the latter having emerged from an embrasure, where he had been chatting with the Comtesse de la Torre. All three then quitted the room, and one of them, as we are aware, left his heart behind him. By the advice of the Duc de Montbazon, they kept on the right of the grand saloon, and so avoided the king, who was on the other side of the hall.

Ever self-possessed, Charles manifested no undue haste,

but moved majestically through the long suite of apartments which he had previously traversed.

Among the pages and attendants collected in the grand corridor was Chevilly, and on seeing the prince and his companions, and finding they desired to depart, he conducted them to the vestibule, where he left them while he summoned their carriage.

In a few minutes he reappeared, ushered them to the coach, and, posted on the marche-pied as before, attended them to their hotel. On dismissing him, the prince rewarded him with a dozen pistoles.

It was fortunate for the success of Charles's project that he did not delay his departure. He had not quitted the ante-room many minutes when the king entered it. His majesty's countenance appeared disturbed, and he glanced inquisitively round the room.

"Where are those Englishmen?" he said abruptly to the queen. "I was told they were here."

"They are gone, sire," replied Anne. "I am sorry for it. They dance remarkably well. Don't you think so, sire?"

"I scarcely noticed their dancing," rejoined Louis, sharply. "But I want to know who they are."

"You must apply to the Duc de Montbazon then, sire," said the queen. "They are English noblemen, that is all I can tell you."

"Their rank is undoubted, sire," remarked Marie de Médicis. "You may take my assurance for that."

"You know them, madame?" cried Louis.

"I do," she replied. "But I am not at liberty to disclose their names to-night. To-morrow I will tell you who they are. Suspend your curiosity till then."

With this the king was obliged to be content, and soon afterwards returned to the ball-room, but in no very good humour.

Before retiring to rest, Charles wrote a long letter to his august father, describing his journey to Paris, and detailing all that had befallen him since his arrival in the French capital. Besides recording his impressions

of the principal personages he had seen at the Luxembourg and the Louvre, Charles spoke in rapturous terms of the beauty of Anne of Austria, but he did not praise the Princess Henriette Marie as highly as she deserved. To have said all he thought of her, might have appeared like disloyalty to the Infanta. Buckingham at the same time indited a humorous epistle to his dear dad and gossip.

As soon as these despatches were completed, they were consigned to a courier who was waiting for them, and who started, without a moment's delay, for Calais.

"Henriette Marie is very charming," thought Charles, as he sought his couch. "I cannot get her out of my head."

"Anne of Austria is the loveliest creature on earth," cried Buckingham, as he paced to and fro within his chamber, thinking over the events of the evening. "I am in despair at quitting Paris. Yet I must go."

XIV

IN WHAT MANNER JACK AND TOM LEFT PARIS, AND OF THE ADVENTURE THEY MET WITH IN THE FOREST OF ORLÉANS.

NEXT morning, at a very early hour, Charles was aroused from his slumbers by Cottington, who entered the prince's chamber with a light.

"Is it time to arise, Cottington?" demanded Charles, drowsily.

"Your highness can rest as long as you please," replied the other. "Since midnight an order has been sent by the king to all postmasters, prohibiting them to supply us with horses. It will be impossible, therefore, for your highness to leave Paris."

"But I will not be stayed!" cried Charles, starting up

in his couch. "I will buy horses if I cannot hire them. See to it, Cottington—see to it."

Permit me to observe to your highness that horses are not to be bought at this untimely hour, and, before we can procure them, in all probability a further order will be issued by the king interdicting your departure from Paris."

"Call my lord of Buckingham, and bid him come to me instantly," cried Charles.

But before the order could be obeyed, Graham burst into the chamber, exclaiming: "Good news! good news! your highness will be able to start for Madrid after all. M. Chevilly is without, and says he can remove the new difficulty that has arisen."

"That is good news indeed, Dick!" cried Charles. "Let him come in. Good-morrow, Chevilly," he added, as the valet made his appearance. "What can you do for us?"

"I can help your highness to leave Paris," replied Chevilly. "The duke my master has sent you horses. They are the best in his stables, and will carry you twenty or thirty leagues with ease. A piqueur and two palefreniers will go with you to bring them back. If I may presume to do so, I would respectfully counsel your highness to start as speedily as may be, for fear of further interruption."

"Your counsel is good, Chevilly, and shall not be neglected," returned Charles. "Let all prepare for immediate departure."

On this the chamber was cleared, and Charles, springing from his couch, proceeded to attire himself for the journey.

Meantime, under the careful surveillance of Chevilly, the superb steeds, sent for the use of the prince and his attendants by the considerate Duc de Montbazon, were saddled and bridled by the palefreniers, who next proceeded to secure the pack-saddles, containing the baggage, on their own hackneys.

In less than a half an hour all necessary preparations

were completed, and shortly afterwards Charles and Buckingham, accoutred in their new riding-dresses, boots, and broad-leaved hats, entered the *salle à manger*, where the rest of the party were assembled. Such was the prince's impatience to be gone, that he declined to partake of the breakfast that had been prepared for him, and thrusting a pair of pistols into his belt, and throwing a cartouche-belt over his shoulder, called out, "To horse, gentlemen, to horse!"

Marshalled by the host, whose account had already been discharged by Endymion Porter, the whole party repaired to the court-yard, where the steeds were impatiently pawing the ground. Charles selected a powerful black charger for his own use, and Buckingham made choice of a magnificent grey.

"I trust the duke your master will not incur his majesty's displeasure by the service he has rendered me," said Charles to Chevilly, as the latter held his stirrup.

"My master promised the queen that your highness's departure should not be prevented—and he has kept his word," replied the valet.

"Fail not to make my best acknowledgments to him," said Charles, bestowing a handful of pistoles on Chevilly as he vaulted into the saddle. "Farewell, friend."

In another minute, the whole party being mounted, the gates of the hotel were thrown open, and the cavalcade issued forth into the Rue de Bourbon, preceded by the piqueur.

But for this *avant garde*, who answered all questions satisfactorily, they must have been stopped by the watch. Having traversed the Rue Jacob, the Rue Colombier, and several other sombre streets, they skirted the high walls surrounding the close of the great convent of Carthusians, and at last reached the *Barrière d'Enfer*, where they were detained for a short time, as the gate was not yet opened, and the warder refused to let them pass, but on the production by the piqueur of an order from the Duc de Montbazon, the obstacle was removed, and they were allowed to proceed on their journey.

No sooner were they clear of the Faubourg Saint Jacques, than, setting spurs to their steeds, they galloped along the high road to Orléans, passing without halt, or slackening of pace, through Bourg la Reine, Sceaux, and Berny, and never pausing till they reached Longjumeau, where they pulled up for a few minutes at a cabaret to refresh their horses and drink a cup of wine.

The arrival of the cavalcade in the little town at this early hour in the morning—it was then only seven o'clock—created quite a sensation, and many of the inhabitants flocked towards the cabaret to look at them. All knew, from their horses and attendants, that they must be persons of rank, but the piqueur, though questioned by the aubergiste and the garçons d'écurie, would give no information, except that they were English noblemen.

Neither Charles nor Buckingham dismounted, and their distinguished appearance pointed them out as the chief personages of the troop. After they had drunk a flagon of Anjou wine, which was handed them by the hôtelier, Charles exclaimed,

"What ails you, Tom? You have not uttered a word since we left Paris. I never knew you so silent before."

"I have been thinking of that divine queen," responded Buckingham. "But you have been equally silent, Jack. I suspect, from your pensive air, that your thoughts have been occupied by the charming princess. Am I not right?"

"Her image will recur to me, I own," rejoined Charles. "But henceforward I shall banish it, and think only of the Infanta. But we have stayed here long enough. Allons, messieurs!" he cried to his attendants.

At the words, Cottington and the two others, who were standing at the door of the cabaret talking to the host, instantly mounted their steeds, the palefreniers followed their example, and the piqueur, taking off his cap to Charles, rode on in advance. The whole party then set off at a gallop, and were soon out of sight.

On, on they went, flying like the wind past the old château of Mont-Lhéry, perched on its rocky heights,

and traversing a pleasant country, erst dyed with Burgundian blood, clearing league after league without fatigue to themselves, and apparently without fatigue to their gallant coursers, until they reached Arpajan.

After a brief halt they again set forward, speeding on swiftly as before, devouring the distance that lay between the pretty little town they had just quitted and Etrecy.

By this time both Charles and Buckingham having quite recovered their spirits, laughed and chatted merrily. Everything contributed to make their journey agreeable—a fine day, and a charming country, presenting a succession of lovely landscapes.

“How rapidly and easily we get on,” cried Charles. “These admirable horses will spoil us for the rest of the journey. It is a pity we shall lose them at Etampes.”

“I see no reason for that,” rejoined Buckingham. “With an hour’s rest they will carry us several leagues farther. If they should be harmed, which is not likely, we will replace them by horses from England.”

On arriving at Etampes, Charles consulted the piqueur, who said:

“Monseigneur, with an hour’s rest here, and another hour at Artenay, the horses will carry you very well to Orléans.”

“But that is more than the duke your master bargained for, my good friend,” said Charles.

“Pardon, monseigneur. My master has placed the horses entirely at your disposal,” rejoined the piqueur. “Do as you please with them.”

“Then you shall go on with us to Orléans,” said Charles. “We will not part with the horses a league sooner than necessary.”

After the lapse of an hour, during which the horses had been well cared for, and their riders recruited by a plentiful repast and several flasks of excellent wine, the whole party got once more into the saddle, and were soon scouring across the broad and fertile plains of La Beauce, in the direction of Montdésir. Acting on

the piqueur's suggestions, Charles and his companions made another halt at Artenay, and then set forward again.

Night was now rapidly approaching, and it soon became quite dark. Moreover, just as they entered the Forest of Orléans—a vast woody region of some leagues in extent, which lay between them and that city—a heavy thunderstorm came on, accompanied by torrents of rain. No place of shelter being near, there was nothing for it but to brave the storm, so, wrapping their cloaks around them, they went on. Peal after peal of thunder rattled overhead, and the flashes of lightning were almost blinding. Still the piqueur rode gallantly on, and the calvacade followed him.

Despite the personal inconvenience he endured, the storm excited Charles's admiration. One moment all was buried in obscurity; the next, the whole thicket seemed in a blaze. Thus shown by the vivid flashes, the trees looked so weird and fantastic, that it almost seemed to the prince as if he was riding through an enchanted forest. For some time the cavalcade, headed by the piqueur, went on without interruption, but at last the broken state of the ground compelled them to proceed with caution.

Suddenly the piqueur came to a stop, and owned that he had missed his way. But he felt certain, he said, that he could soon regain it. A consultation was then held as to the best course to be pursued under the circumstances. Buckingham and some of the others were for turning back, but Charles, believing the piqueur could get them out of the difficulty, determined to go on.

Accordingly, the cavalcade got once more into motion, but now proceeded at a foot's pace. The alley which they were threading was of considerable length, but it brought them in the end to an open space, in the midst of which grew three or four trees of the largest size and great age, veritable patriarchs of the grove. But here the difficulties of the travellers appeared to have increased, for though there were several outlets from

the clearance they had gained, they could not tell which to select.

While they were in this state of incertitude, it was with no slight satisfaction that they descried through the gloom a figure approaching them. As this person drew nearer, the lightning showed him to be a powerfully-built man, in the garb of a peasant. Probably a woodcutter, as he carried a hatchet on his shoulder.

"What ho, master!" cried the piqueur, calling out to him. "Wilt guide us to the high road to Orleans?"

"Ay, marry will I," replied the woodcutter; "but you have strayed far away from it, and are not likely to find it again without help. It is lucky for you that I came up, or you might have passed the night in the forest."

"Is there no place where we can dry our wet apparel, and obtain refreshment?" said Charles.

"You cannot do better than come to my cottage, messieurs," replied the man. "My name is Jacques Leroux. I am a woodcutter, as my father was before me, and my grandfather before him, and as my sons André and Marcel will be after me; but I have saved some money, and live comfortably enough, as you will see. Many a traveller who has missed his way in the forest, as you have done to-night, has fared well—though I say it—and slept soundly at my cottage."

"Perchance too soundly," remarked Buckingham, with a laugh. "Well, we will go to thy cottage, honest Jacques," he continued, "and when the storm is over thou shalt take us to the road to Orléans, and we will reward thee handsomely."

"The storm will be over in an hour," said Jacques Leroux, "and then the moon will have risen. Once on the highway, you will soon reach Orléans."

"I am glad to hear it," cried Buckingham. "Canst give us aught for supper, honest Jacques?"

"My larder is not badly supplied," replied the woodcutter, with a laugh, "and I have a few flasks of rare Beaugency in my cellar."

"Nay, if thou hast a larder and cellar we shall not fare badly," said Buckingham. "Lead us to thy cottage, good Jacques."

"This way, messieurs," returned the woodcutter, striking into an alley on the right, which proved so narrow and intricate that the horsemen were obliged to proceed along it singly. Jacques Leroux, however, being familiar with the path, tracked it without difficulty, and at a quick pace, but he ever and anon stopped to cheer on those behind him.

"You appear to be taking us into the heart of the forest, friend," cried Charles, who was at the head of the column.

"You are within a bow-shot of my dwelling, monsieur," replied the woodcutter. "You will see the lights in a moment. I will let my daughter know I am coming," he added, placing a whistle to his lips, and blowing a shrill and somewhat startling call.

Immediately afterwards the troop emerged upon a patch of ground entirely free from timber. In the midst of this area stood a cottage, with a stable and some other outbuildings attached to it.

Again Jacques Leroux blew his whistle, and no sooner had he done so than the cottage door was thrown open, allowing the radiance of a cheerful fire to stream forth. Just within the threshold might be seen a young woman, and a boy some ten or twelve years old, whom the woodcutter informed Charles were his youngest son Marcel, and his daughter Rose.

"Our young foresters call her Rose des Bois," said Jacques, with a laugh, "and several of them are anxious to take her from me, but I don't desire to part with her just yet. Will it please you to alight, messieurs? You need have no anxiety about the horses. There is a stable large enough to hold them all, and Marcel will find them plenty of good fodder."

"You seem well provided with everything, friend," observed Charles, as he alighted.

"Heaven be praised, I want nothing, and am well contented with my lot," replied the woodcutter.

By this time the whole party had alighted, and Jacques called to his son to bring a lantern and help the pale-freniers to take the horses to the stable. This order being promptly obeyed, the woodcutter ushered his guests into his dwelling, and on passing through the doorway Charles and his companions found themselves in a large comfortable room, cheerfully illumined by a wood fire, which was blazing on the hearthstone.

Benches were set on either side of the wide-mouthed chimney, and in the middle of the room there was a large oak table, with several stools placed around it. A gammon of bacon, a goodly stock of hams, with other dried meats depending from the rafters, showed that the cottage did not lack the materials of good cheer, while an open cupboard displayed a large pasty, a cheese, eggs, butter, and an abundant supply of bread—far more than seemed to be required by the woodcutter and his family.

Besides these unmistakable evidences of plenty, which were very satisfactory to the travellers, a large black iron pot, hanging from a hook over the fire, diffused an odour throughout the chamber that left no doubt as to the savoury nature of its contents.

At the moment the party entered, the woodcutter's daughter was placing fresh logs on the fire, and as she turned to salute them, they were all struck by her good looks, and Charles remarked to her father that she well deserved her appellation of *Rose des Bois*.

The damsel, who might be about eighteen, had a rich dark complexion, bright black eyes, somewhat too bold, perhaps, in expression, hair black as jet, and growing low down on the forehead, and strongly marked, handsome eyebrows. She wore large gold earrings, gold ornaments in her lace cap, and a gold cross above her bodice. The skirts of her scarlet petticoat were short enough to display her well-formed limbs, and her sabots were no dis-

figurement to her trim ankles and small feet. The drawbacks to her beauty were the bold looks we have mentioned, and a somewhat masculine manner.

She eyed the travellers with unrestrained curiosity, and though she could rarely have seen such visitors, did not appear at all abashed. Graham, however, chiefly attracted her attention, and she more than once regarded him fixedly.

Throwing off their cloaks, the travellers seated themselves on the benches near the fire, to dry their wet apparel. While they were thus disposed, and active preparations for supper were being made by Jacques and his daughter, the latter of whom was spreading a snow-white cloth on the table, the two palefreniers entered with the saddle-bags which Endymion Porter had ordered to be brought into the cottage. On perceiving this arrangement, which he had evidently not anticipated, a cloud came over the woodcutter's brow, and he cast a significant look at his daughter.

The look did not escape Graham, and from its peculiarity awakened his suspicions. He said nothing, however, but, getting up from the bench, sat down near the table, and while chatting gaily with Rose, kept a watchful eye upon her father.

Having placed a large pasty, with other cold provisions, on the table, Jacques Leroux told his daughter that he was going to fetch a few flasks of Beaugency, and quitted the chamber by a side-door. No sooner was he gone than Rose drew close to Graham, and said, in a low tone,

"What has brought you here?"

"We came by your father's invitation," replied the young man, in the same tone.

"Jacques Leroux is not my father," replied Rose. "But no matter. What it concerns you to know is, that you are in danger of your life. You may have heard that the Forest of Orléans is infested by a band of robbers. Jacques Leroux is their captain. He has contrived

to ensnare you, and, be assured, he will not let you escape."

"Bah! we are too numerous a party, and too well armed, to fear attack," rejoined Graham. "You want to frighten me away, my pretty Rose. But I will not go, unless you will consent to accompany me."

"You think I am jesting, but I am in earnest, as you will find. You heard Jacques whistle as he approached the cottage. That was a signal to a scout, who immediately started to collect the band. They will be here presently."

"Sdeath! this is more serious than I thought," said Graham, uneasily. "I must alarm my friends."

"On no account," she replied, imposing silence upon him by a look.

At this moment Jacques Leroux entered, carrying half a dozen flasks of wine, three of which he set upon the table, but he put the others aside.

"Don't drink that wine—it is drugged," whispered Rose des Bois.

"I am half inclined to blow out the rascal's brains," said Graham, laying his hand upon a pistol.

Just then the outer door of the cottage was opened, and a young man, in a woodcutter's garb like that of Leroux, came in, and respectfully saluted the strangers.

"So you are returned from Courcelles, André," remarked Jacques, with a significant look at him. "Have you executed all my orders?"

"All, father," replied André.

"The band have arrived," whispered Rose des Bois.

"But trust to me, and I will save you."

"By my faith, this is a devoted damsel," thought Graham. "But though I am willing to trust her, on the first movement made by these villains that looks like mischief I will shoot them, be the consequences what they may. The prince has been dying for an adventure—he has met with one at last. Hark'ee, my pretty Rose des Bois," he added, in an under tone to her. "There

are far more valuable lives than mine at stake. None of my companions must be harmed."

"Trust to me, and you shall all get away safely," she replied.

As she spoke, the sound of horses was heard outside, and André, opening the door, exclaimed,

"There are more travellers here, father. What shall we do with their horses? The stable is full."

"Put them in the shed," replied Jacques. And he went out with his son, closing the door after him.

Scarcely were they gone, than Rose hastily removed the flasks which Jacques had set upon the table, and put the three others in their place.

"You may drink this wine with safety," she said to Graham.

Shortly afterwards, Jacques and André returned with half a dozen persons of very suspicious mien. As the new comers took off their cloaks and broad-leaved hats, it appeared they were all well armed with pistols and swords.

On their appearance, Charles and his companions moved from the fireside to the table.

"I have so many guests here to-night, *messieurs*," said Jacques to the new comers, "that I ~~shall~~ not be able to offer you very good accommodatioⁿ. But I will do my best."

"That is all we require," said the foremoⁿ of the party. "You can give us a flask of good wine—~~that~~ we know from experience."

"Ay, that I can—as good as you will get at Orléans," rejoined Jacques. "Pray be seated near the fire," he added, pointing to the benches vacated by Charles and his companions. "I will bring you the wine immediately, but I must first serve these gentlemen, who are waiting for supper."

With this, he proceeded to uncork the flasks which had just been set on the table by Rose, and filled the goblets for Charles and his companions.

"This is the Beaugency I spoke of, *messieurs*," he

said. "It has a rare flavour. I will venture to say you never tasted wine equal to it."

"Then I propose a bumper all round," cried Graham, glancing at his companions. "Fill for yonder gentlemen, Maître Jacques."

"Ay, fill us bumpers, Jacques," shouted the guests at the fireplace.

"This flask is empty. I will bring you another, messieurs," cried the woodcutter, taking up one of those which Rose had removed.

While he was occupied in filling the flagons of the party near the fire, Rose whispered a word or two in Graham's ear.

"Nay, you and your son must join us, my good friend," cried the latter to Jacques.

"Doubt me not," replied the woodcutter, laughing.

"Bring two more flagons, André."

The young man brought him the cups, which he instantly filled.

"To your health, messieurs!" cried Graham. "If you are the boon companions you seem, you will not leave a drop in the cup."

With this he emptied his goblet, and turned it upside down. All those at the table did the same.

"They are ours now," remarked Jacques, winking at his associates.

"You seem to hesitate, messieurs," cried Graham. "We have set you a good example."

"Hesitate—not we!" responded the foremost of the brigands. "To your healths, messieurs! May you always meet with honest men like us!"

And the whole party emptied their flagons, their example being followed by Jacques and André.

"By my faith, friend Jacques, this Beaugency of yours is a most powerful wine," cried Graham. "It has already got into my head. I feel quite drowsy."

"So do we," cried the others at the table.

"Take another cup—it won't hurt you," responded Jacques.

"Fill for me, then," said Graham.

As the woodcutter approached the table, he staggered and fell to the ground. André sprang to his father's assistance, but while trying to raise him, he also sank on the floor in a state of stupefaction.

"What's the matter?" cried Graham, rising from his chair. "Have you and your son been taken suddenly ill, my good friend?"

"We have drunk the wrong wine," cried Jacques to his comrades, trying in vain to rise.

"Malediction!" exclaimed the foremost of the brigands, tumbling from the bench.

So powerless had he and his comrades become, that not one of them could draw a pistol. In vain they struggled against the effects of the soporific potion they had swallowed. In another minute they were all buried in a profound stupor.

"We have had a narrow escape," cried Graham. "We owe our lives, perhaps, to this damsel."

"Let us quit the place immediately, and make the best of our way to Orléans," said Charles.

"You must take me with you," said Rose des Bois. "If I am left here, when these men recover they will infallibly put me to death."

"Do not imagine we are going to abandon you, after what you have done for us," replied Graham. "We will take you with us to Orléans, and, moreover, you shall be well rewarded."

Leaving the senseless brigands, the party then went forth, and, guided by Rose, proceeded towards the stable. Close to the building they found Marcel, who tried to escape on seeing them, but, being caught by Graham, the lad gave up the key of the stable, in which he had contrived to lock up the piqueur and palefreniers, who were clamouring lustily to get out. Without loss of time the men were set free, and the horses brought out. The pack-saddles were then fetched from the cottage, and being secured as before, the whole party mounted their steeds. As Jacques Leroux had predicted, the storm had

passed away. Still, though the moon was now shining brightly, and tipping the trees with silver, it was necessary to have a guide through the forest, so the travellers determined to take Marcel with them, and accordingly placed him in front of the piqueur, who had orders to shoot him if he misled them. The next point was how to convey Rose des Bois. This was settled by Graham, who took her on his saddle-bow.

All these arrangements being made with great expedition, the party set off, and following Marcel's directions, eventually reached the high road to Orléans.

Before this, however, the lad had contrived to loosen the belt by which he was bound to the piqueur, and watching his opportunity, slipped off the horse; and, though the piqueur fired at him, he escaped uninjured, and disappeared among the trees. His flight, however, gave the party no concern.

In half an hour more they had cleared the forest, and had gained the faubourg of the ancient city of Orléans.

On reaching these habitations, Rose des Bois said to Graham:

"Here we must part. But whither are you going?"

"I am going far hence, my pretty Rose," he replied.

"But where?" she demanded, impatiently. "Tell me where."

"To Madrid," he replied. "It is not likely we shall meet again."

"Perhaps we may. Farewell!"

And, disengaging herself, she sprang lightly to the ground.

Graham offered her his purse, but she refused it with an impatient gesture, and hurried away.

The party then rode on to the gates of Orléans, and not without some difficulty obtained admittance to the city. This being at last accomplished, they proceeded to the Hôtel du Loiret, and entered it just as the bell of the cathedral tolled the hour of midnight.

XV.

POW JACK AND TOM RODE TO BORDEAUX, AND HOW THEY RECEIVED
A VISIT FROM THE DUC D'EPERNON.

NEXT morning, at seven o'clock, our travellers started once more on their journey, mounted on post-horses, and attended by a couple of postilions.

Before setting out, Charles liberally rewarded the piqueur and the palefreniers, who undertook that the ends of Justice should not be neglected, and promised to obtain from the magistrates of the city a force sufficient for the capture of the brigands. This, we may state, was effected the same day, and the whole band brought prisoners to Orléans.

Our impatient travellers saw nothing of the ancient city, which derives its chief interest from the heroic and ill-fated Jeanne d'Arc, save what was presented to them as they traversed the streets to the Porte de Blois.

Their road now lay on the right bank of the Loire, and throughout the day they kept near that enchanting river, which mirrors on its waves such lovely vine-clad slopes and hills, and such picturesque old towns and grand feudal chateaux. Blois and Amboise, with their regal castles, detained the travellers for a short time, and it was not until nightfall that they reached Tours.

Off again next morning betimes, they approached Châtelleraut about noon, and traversing the antique bridge across the Vienne, garnished at either end with towers, they entered the town, and resting there for an hour, pursued their way to Poitiers, where they arrived sufficiently early to devote some time to the examination of a town replete with historical recollections, many of them of deep interest to Charles.

Before retiring to rest they heard vespers in the cathedral, and after attending matins in the beautiful church

of Sainte Radegonde, and visiting several other interesting structures, they started for Angoulême, arriving there, after a brief halt at Civray, early in the evening.

Again early in the saddle, and descending the steep hill on which Angoulême is reared, they speeded merrily along the valley, the limit of their day's journey being Bordeaux. At Barbezieux they stopped to dine, and at La Graulle came upon a bare and desolate heath of vast extent, which gave them a foretaste of the Landes, which they expected shortly to traverse.

At Cubsac, where in our own times there is a suspension-bridge of wondrous size and beauty, they crossed the broad estuary of the Dordogne in a ferry-boat, and had a somewhat perilous passage, the wind being high. However, they got over in safety, and pursued their journey through a fair and fertile region covered with vineyards, and gradually gained an eminence, from the summit of which the wide Garonne, with the proud city of Bordeaux throned on its opposite bank, burst upon their view.

The prospect was magnificent, and held them for some time in admiration. At length they descended the vine-clad slopes of the hill, and tracking a long avenue of fine trees, came to the ferry at La Bastide—there was no bridge then across the Garonne—and immediately embarked.

During their passage across the broad and impetuous river they enjoyed an admirable view of the city, with its old walls, towers, churches, and edifices, chief among which were the cathedral with its twin spires, the *Eglise Sainte Croix*, *Saint Michel* with its beautiful detached belfry, *Saint Saurin*, the old *Evêché*, and the *Hôtel de Ville*. In the port were numerous vessels, for Bordeaux even then was a place of extensive commerce. The travellers landed near one of the ancient city gates, and caused their pack-saddles and horse furniture to be conveyed to an hotel.

Next morning, instead of prosecuting their journey, they spent several hours in inspecting the curiosities of

the city, and had just returned from a visit to the port, when the hôtelier entered, and throwing open the door of the salon with as much ceremoniousness as an usher, announced M. le Duc d'Epéron.

The person who entered the room on this announcement was about seventy, but his tall figure was erect, and although his beard and moustaches were grey, his features retained something of the remarkable comeliness which had distinguished them in the days of Henri Trois.

The Duc d'Epéron was attired in a pourpoint and trunk hose of brown quilted satin, with a velvet mantle of the same colour, the latter being ornamented with the order of the Saint Esprit. On his head he wore a black velvet toque, adorned with a red feather and a diamond brooch. Funnel-topped boots, provided with large spurs, completed his costume, and he carried a cravache in his hand.

Immediately on his entrance, Charles and Buckingham arose to meet him, and their appearance and dignity of manner evidently struck him with surprise. While gravely and courteously saluting them, he carefully scanned their features.

"I have to apologise to you for this intrusion, messieurs," he said, with exquisite politeness, "but I will explain the motive of my visit, and then I trust you will excuse it."

"Your visit requires no excuse, M. le Duc," replied Charles, with princely grace. "That a nobleman of such distinction as yourself, one of the brightest ornaments of the courts of Henri Trois and Henri le Grand, should visit persons so obscure as myself and my brother, Tom Smith, is an honour we never could have anticipated, and we cannot fail, therefore, to be highly gratified by your condescension."

"Corbleu! monsieur," cried D'Epéron, bowing and smiling, "unless I am greatly mistaken, there is little condescension on my part. Had I been aware of your rank, rest assured I should not have presented myself in

this uncereemonious manner, and I must again entreat you to excuse me."

"And I must repeat," returned Charles, "that the honour is entirely on our side. Pray be seated, M. le Duc."

"I have lived too much in courts, monsieur, to be deceived," observed D'Epernon, taking the chair offered him by the prince. "It may please you and your brother to style yourselves the Messieurs Smith, but I do not think I should be far wrong if I gave you the highest titles your country can boast. But to my errand. In me, messieurs, you behold the representative of an epoch, now passed away, when it was customary for the nobility of France to exercise hospitality towards all strangers. I cannot change my old habits. I have a château in the neighbourhood of this city, and chancing to ride over this morning, I accidentally heard that some English travellers were staying in this hotel. I therefore came hither to pray you to be my guests for as long a period as it may please you to remain with me."

"We would gladly accept your hospitality, M. le Duc," replied Charles, "but to-morrow we start for Bayonne and Spain."

"Then I can only express my regret, messieurs," replied D'Epernon, rising. "It would have gratified me to entertain you at my château, and to show you some of the beauties of this country, but I will not attempt to delay you."

"Stay, M. le Duc," said Buckingham. "With you there can be no necessity for disguise, and I will, therefore, inform you that the person whom you have had the honour of addressing is no other than Charles, Prince of Wales."

"I felt assured of it," replied D'Epernon, bowing to the ground. "And you, monseigneur, unless I am greatly mistaken, are the Marquis of Buckingham."

"You are right, M. le Duc," said Charles. "But I confide myself to your discretion. I am travelling strictly incognito."

"Your highness may certainly rely on me," returned D'Epernon. "I guess the purpose of your journey to Spain. It is an enterprise worthy of a chivalrous prince like yourself. I trust you may meet with no interruption, and to prevent the chance of your detention at Bayonne, I will furnish you with a letter to the governor of that city, my friend, the Comte de Grammont. I am banished from court, as your highness may possibly be aware, having had the misfortune to make Cardinal Richelieu my enemy; but I have still influence enough for this."

So saying, he sat down at the table, on which writing materials were laid, and traced a few lines on a sheet of paper, which he folded up and respectfully presented to Charles.

"If I can be of any further service, your highness has only to command me," he said.

"You can, indeed, serve me in an important particular, M. le Duc," returned Charles. "I am desirous of sending a despatch to the king my father, and need a trusty courier."

"Your highness need give yourself no further trouble. I will find the man you require. In an hour he shall be ready to start."

"I have yet another favour to ask of you, M. le Duc," said Charles.

"It is granted before asked, prince," replied D'Epernon.

"You may repent your rashness," rejoined Charles, smiling. "However, not to keep you in suspense, I will pray you, if you have no better engagement, to give me your company during the remainder of the day. On some future occasion I shall hope to be your guest."

"I would forego any other engagement to accept the invitation, prince," replied D'Epernon, delighted. "I will but seek out the courier, and then place myself at your highness's disposal during the rest of the day."

"We must talk to you, M. le Duc, of your peerless

queen, Anne of Austria, and the lovely princess, Henriette Marie," said Buckingham.

"Have you seen them?" asked D'Epernon, quickly.

"Ay, and danced with them at the Louvre—and without his majesty's knowledge or permission," rejoined Buckingham.

"You surprise me," exclaimed D'Epernon. "I should not have conceived such an adventure possible. But you must regale me with the particulars anon. As I told you, I am a banished man, and know little about the court. But I pity the queen from my heart."

"So do I," sighed Buckingham.

"What think you, prince, of the daughter of my old master, Henri Quatre?" remarked D'Epernon to Charles. "I have not seen her of late, but she promised to be beautiful, and I hear she is so."

"She is charming," replied Charles, emphatically.

"So charming, that our journey to Madrid had well-nigh come to an end, M. le Duc," observed Buckingham, laughing.

"On her account I would it had," rejoined D'Epernon, smiling. "But I fly to execute you highness's order."

And, with a profound reverence, he quitted the room.

Charles and Buckingham then sat down to prepare their despatches, and gave their "dear friend and gossip" an account of their journey from Paris to Bordeaux, omitting, however, all mention of their adventure in the Forest of Orléans, thinking, with reason, that it might cause his majesty alarm. By the time they had finished, D'Epernon returned, telling them the courier was ready to start, and the despatches were forthwith committed to him.

This done, D'Epernon prayed the prince and his attendants to ride with him to view his château, stating that he had horses at their service, and the proposition being readily agreed to, the party went forth with the duke, and were not a little surprised to find a company of thirty gentlemen attired in the duke's splendid livery, and all well mounted, drawn up before the hotel.

"Are you generally attended by so large an escort as this, M. le Duc?" inquired Charles, smiling.

"Ma foi! prince, this is a very sorry attendance," replied the duke. "During the regency of the queen-mother, I used to go daily to the Louvre with an escort of eight hundred gentlemen."

"So I have heard, M. le Duc," observed Buckingham. "On my return, I will take as large an escort to Whitehall," he thought.

At a sign from D'Epernon, several of his retinue immediately dismounted, and Charles and his companions being thus provided with horses, the party rode to the duke's château, a vast feudal-looking edifice, situated on an eminence on the left bank of the Garonne, about a couple of leagues from Bordeaux. The terrace commanded a superb view of the noble river that swept past it, as well as of the picturesque city in the distance. The finest wine in the district was grown on the duke's estate, and his guests having tasted it and greatly admired it, D'Epernon insisted upon sending a supply for their consumption at the hotel.

After an hour spent in inspecting the château and its beautiful gardens, the party returned to Bordeaux. An excellent dinner was then served, comprehending most of the delicacies for which Bordeaux is renowned, but its chief merit was the incomparable wine furnished by D'Epernon. More than a dozen flasks were crushed. D'Epernon proved a very agreeable companion, and with pardonable egotism recounted many of the incidents of his eventful life.

"It has been my fate," he said, "to witness the assassination of my two royal masters. I was near Henri Trois when the accursed Dominican, Jacques Clément, plunged a knife into his breast, and I was in the carriage with Henri le Grand when that good king was stabbed by the monster Ravaillac. No monarch was ever more beloved than Henri Quatre, and yet he perished thus. I counsel your highness to be ever on your guard. And you, too, my lord of Buckingham, I would have you

take heed. If I am not misinformed, you have bitter enemies amongst the Puritans. Some of those frenzied zealots would deem it a pious act to take your life."

"I have no fear of them," replied Buckingham, with a laugh. "But why do you gaze so hard at me, M. le Duc? Do you read aught in my countenance?"

"You will attain the highest point of your ambition, my lord, but——" And he hesitated.

"Fear not to tell me what you think," said Buckingham.

"You have the same look as my two royal masters," replied D'Epernon. "Be ever on your guard."

This remark produced an impression on Charles, but did not in the slightest degree disturb Buckingham's gaiety. Presently the discourse turned to other topics, and nothing more was thought of the warning.

D'Epernon departed early, and, on taking leave expressed a hope that he should soon hear of the prince's safe arrival at Madrid, and that all proceeded according to his highness's desire. Accompanied by his escort, the duke then returned to his château.

"Those are two noble-looking personages, and seem to have a great career before them," he thought, as he rode along; "but both will be cut off early."

XVI.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TRAVELLERS, AND WHAT THEY BEHELD,
AS THEY CROSSED THE GREAT LANDES.

As usual, our travellers started at an early hour in the morning, attended as before by a couple of postilions.

Shortly after quitting the beautiful neighbourhood of Bordeaux, where the plains teemed with plenty, and the heights were covered with vines, they came upon those vast sandy plateaux known as the Great Landes.

No heath they had ever traversed in England appeared so wild and desolate as the apparently interminable waste on which they had now entered. Far as the eye could stretch spread out a vast monotonous plain, flat as the ocean when its waves are still, composed of ash-coloured sand, occasionally rising into little hillocks, covered with heath, stunted broom, and gorse, but without any other sign of vegetation, save that in the extreme distance there were dark lines indicating pine forests. The only discernible road over this dreary waste was the causeway, which the cavalcade was now tracking; and even this was at intervals obliterated by the drifting sand, and could only be recovered by an experienced eye.

The most singular feature of the scene, and that which especially interested our travellers, was the fantastic appearance of the shepherds of the Landes, who looked like inhabitants of some other planet. Before the party had advanced far they noticed a sort of cabin, designated in the language of the country a *parc*, and looking like an enormous mushroom, supported in the centre by the trunk of a tree. Such as it was, this cabin, open to all the winds of heaven, afforded sufficient shelter to the shepherds of the Landes, who lead a nomad life. Near it were three or four herdsmen tending a flock of lean sheep, and a few equally lean cattle, though it was a

marvel as to how the animals could obtain sufficient subsistence in that wilderness. The peasants were mounted on stilts, called in their patois *chanques*, which raised them a couple of yards from the ground. Over their shoulders they wore sheepskin cloaks, and berets on their heads, and each was provided with a long pole.

On seeing the travellers, the herdsmen started towards them, moving with gigantic strides, and were soon by the side of the troop. They easily kept up with the horses, even though the latter were going at full speed. After accompanying the cavalcade for half a league, the peasants dropped off, and returned to their flocks.

As our travellers proceeded, and approached the tracts covered with pines, which flourish vigorously in this sandy soil, and yield a plentiful supply of resin, they found that whatever else the inhospitable region might want, it was by no means destitute of game. Rabbits and hares abounded, a roebuck was now and then descried, and the travellers, catching sight of a wild sow and her marcellins, were half tempted to pursue them. On the plains they saw bustards, in the lakes wild geese, and cranes amid the shallow pools. The marshes were frequented by bitterns, curlews, wild ducks, and coots, and from the pine forests arose clouds of wood-pigeons.

That there were also formidable animals to be encountered, was proved as the party went on. They had just passed a pine forest, and crossed a rude bridge thrown across a stream, the waters of which were black as ink, when they heard loud outcries, and, looking in the direction whence the shouts proceeded, perceived that a flock of sheep had been attacked by a pack of wolves. Three or four shepherds, aided by powerful dogs, were engaged in an unequal conflict with their fierce aggressors; but the wolves were too numerous for them, and had already caused great havoc among the flock. Fortunately, the shepherds were kept by their stils out of reach of the savage beasts.

Without a moment's hesitation the travellers dashed

to the assistance of the shepherds, and, as soon as they were within pistol-shot, fired at the wolves, killing a couple of them, and wounding others. The rest of the pack, displaying their blood-stained fangs, turned fiercely on their assailants, but, ere they could come up, three more dropped by another discharge. Though their numbers were thus thinned, two of the largest and fiercest of the troop attacked Buckingham. From one of these he liberated himself with a stroke of his poniard, and the other was shot by Graham. Another was killed by Charles, and the rest took to flight, pursued by the shepherds and their hounds. This rout being accomplished in a very short space of time, our travellers turned to rejoin the postilions, who prudently awaited their return on the causeway.

Graham, however, had singled out a large wolf, and after a hot pursuit of some two or three hundred yards, succeeded in shooting the ferocious beast. This feat achieved, he dashed across the plain to join the others who had already regained the causeway. Perceiving the course he was taking, the postilions called out to him, but not understanding the meaning of their cries, and pursuing his career, he was suddenly engulfed in one of those treacherous sand-pits peculiar to the Landes, called in that region *mouvants*. These dangerous quagmires, concealed by a covering of sand supported by aquatic plants and dried on the surface, form traps from which escape is always difficult, and sometimes impossible.

On touching the sandy crust by which the pool was hidden, Graham's horse immediately sank above the shoulder. Luckily the postilions perceived what had occurred, and shouting to him to keep still, hurried to the scene of the disaster, and as soon as they came up, they directed him to dismount cautiously, and then to remain motionless for a few minutes, to allow the sand to settle. This he did; but he had scarcely complied with the injunction when the shepherds came to his assistance, and wading into the pool with their stilts, quickly extricated him from his perilous position. The horse was

also dragged out of the quagmire by the exertions of the shepherds, and the travellers were enabled to proceed on their way.

For upwards of four hours they continued their journey through the Landes, changing horses at post-houses, which in several instances were only solitary inns, with large stables attached to them. Everywhere the aspect was the same; vast sandy plains, relieved only by black pine forests, marshes, swamps, pools, and lakes, all of which abounded, as we have mentioned, with wild-fowl of every description. Cabins such as we have already described were frequently to be seen, but the hamlets and villages were composed of miserable habitations. Long before this the travellers had discerned the jagged and snowy peaks of the Pyrenees, and the horizon was now bounded by the long chain of these magnificent mountains.

As the travellers approached a village, which was somewhat larger and better built than any they had as yet beheld in the Landes, they heard the sound of bagpipes, and presently afterwards perceived a band of youths and maidens in holiday attire, decorated with ribands, and carrying bouquets in their hands. While moving along the troop executed a dance to the music of the pipes. Behind them came a large charette, drawn by oxen covered with white housings, and having their horns tied with ribands. In the charette was a pyramid formed of pieces of household furniture, on the top of which sat a middle-aged woman holding a distaff, while round the pile, and standing on the ledges of the cart, were grouped a number of comely damsels.

On inquiry, the travellers learnt that a marriage was about to take place on the following day, and that the bride's furniture was being conveyed in this manner to her future dwelling. The old woman with the distaff was the bride's mother.

In the rear of the charette marched a little procession, headed by the curé of the village and the young couple whom he was so soon about to link together. A large

concourse of villagers of both sexes, including many old people and children, made up the procession. All were dressed in their best, and decorated with ribands.

As the travellers moved out of the way to let the jocund train pass by, they were greeted with merry shouts and laughter from the youths and maidens.

No other incident worthy of note happened to the prince and his companions during their ride across the Landes. At Saint Vincent they left the sandy wastes behind them, and entered upon a fertile country.

It was growing dusk as they gained the heights overlooking Bayonne, but sufficient light was left to enable them to discern that strongly fortified town, situated near the junction of the Adour and the Nive.

Descending the hill, they quitted their horses at the faubourg Saint Esprit, and were ferried across both rivers, but were detained at the gates of the town for some time. At last, however, they were permitted to enter, and at once proceeded to an hôtellerie.

XVII.

HOW THE TRAVELLERS WERE BROUGHT BEFORE THE GOVERNOR OF BAYONNE.

THE party had just supped, and, wearied with their long day's journey, were about to retire to rest, when an officer, attended by half a dozen arquebusiers, was shown into their presence, and informed them that he was sent by M. le Comte de Grammont, the governor of Bayonne, to bring them immediately before him.

It being impossible to refuse compliance with the order, the whole party accompanied the officer and were taken to the castle, which was situated in the upper part of the town, at no great distance from the hotel.

After a brief detention in the guard-chamber, they were led across the inner court to the governor's apartments.

The Comte de Grammont was a haughty-looking personage, of middle age, and he glanced sternly at the travellers as they entered.

"You are Englishmen, messieurs," he said, "on your way to Spain. Is it not so?"

Charles replied in the affirmative, adding, "As we are pressed for time, monseigneur, we desire, with your permission, to start at an early hour to-morrow morning."

"I cannot allow you to do so," replied Grammont, coldly.

"You will perhaps condescend to inform us why we are detained, M. le Comte?" observed Buckingham, haughtily.

"As governor of this city, I have no explanation to render, monsieur," said Grammont. "I shall detain you until I am satisfied on certain points."

"Perhaps we may be able to satisfy you on those points now, monseigneur," remarked Cottington. "We are ready to answer any questions you may please to put to us."

"What is the object of your journey to Spain?" demanded Grammont.

"It cannot be publicly declared, and is not of a nature to interest you, monseigneur," replied Charles.

"Pardieu! I know not that," cried Grammont. "You may be engaged on a secret mission to Spain. You arrive here late in the evening, and propose to start at break of day. I suspect you, messieurs, and shall place you under arrest, and cause your luggage to be searched."

"I protest against such treatment, monseigneur," said Charles, "and I am of opinion that you will exceed your authority if you adopt any such harsh proceeding."

There was something in Charles's look and manner that made the governor hesitate in issuing the order.

"I do not desire to deal harshly with you," he said, "but I must be satisfied. Have you no credentials to exhibit?"

"Only this letter, M. le Comte, from the Duc d'Epernon," replied Charles, producing it.

"A letter from D'Epernon!" exclaimed Grammont.

A marked change came over his countenance as he glanced at it, and respect amounting to deference took the place of his previous haughty manner. He immediately arose, and said:

"I am sorry this letter was not shown me before. All further inquiries are needless, and I have to express my profound regret that you should have been put to so much inconvenience."

"The inconvenience is nothing," returned Charles. "We are free, I presume, to start on our journey to-morrow morning?"

"At any hour you please," said Grammont. "But it would charm me," he added, "if you could be induced to rest a day at Bayonne. There is much in the town that merits inspection. However, I will not press you further. Reconduct these gentlemen to their hotel," he added to the officer, "and give orders to the guard at the Porte d'Espagne that the whole party be allowed to pass forth when they please to-morrow morning."

"It shall be done, monseigneur," replied the officer, respectfully.

The Comte de Grammont would fain have accompanied the party to the castle gate, but this Charles would not permit.

XVIII.

JACK AND TOM CROSS THE BIDASSOA AND ENTER SPAIN.

BRIGHT and beautiful was the morning, and the sky deep and cloudless, as Charles and his companions quitted Bayonne by the Porte d'Espagne, and passed through the strong fortifications on that side of the town. After riding about a league, the travellers gained a height which commanded a glorious view. On the left was a portion of the vast chain of the Pyrenees, their snowy peaks glittering in the early sunbeams. On the right lay the Bay of Biscay, with its picturesque headlands and bays stretching out as far as Fontarabia. Behind lay Bayonne, and, seen from this point, the city, with its two fine rivers, its ramparts, forts, castle, and churches, presented a very picturesque appearance.

Spain being now in view, Charles's impatience would brook no delay, and, though he could have spent hours in the contemplation of the splendid prospect before him, he quickly gave the word to proceed, and the whole cavalcade was soon moving on at a rapid pace.

Ere long they approached the shores of the sea, and at Bidart, with its charming little bay, entered the Basque country. They next mounted to Guétary, then descending again, kept close to the coast, charmed with the views it afforded, till they reached Saint Jean de Luz. Halting merely for a relay of horses at this place, they pursued their course to Urrugne.

On ascending a hill which formed a spur of the lower range of the Pyrenees, they beheld the Bidassoa, the stream dividing France and Spain. The sight of this river again roused Charles's impatience, and he dashed down the hill to Behobie, a small town on the right bank of the Bidassoa, and the last in France.

Here they were ferried across the river, which at this

point boasts two little islands, on one of which the crafty Louis XI. held a conference with Henrique IV. of Castile, and on the other, only eight years prior to the date of our history, the ambassadors of France and Spain met to affiance Philip IV. of Spain to Isabella of France, and Louis XIII. to Anne of Austria. The latter isle, it is needless to say, had a special interest to Charles and Buckingham.

"Heaven be praised, I am at last in Spain!" exclaimed the prince, as he leaped ashore from the boat. "Though I am still far from the Infanta, I am in her own land, and amidst her own people, and the space between us shall speedily be cleared."

The horses and postilions were brought across in another ferry-boat, and as soon as they were landed, the whole party mounted, and galloped off on the left bank of the Bidassoa for Irun, which rose before them on a hill about half a league off. This distance was soon traversed, and Charles and Buckingham, for the first time, entered a Spanish town.

Here all seemed changed, and it was manifest, from the costume and aspect of the inhabitants, and from the appearance of the habitations, with their large balconies and awnings, that the travellers were in a very different country from that which they had left on the other side of the Bidassoa.

The party rode up at once to a posada, and here they were obliged to change the horses they had brought from Urrugne for a relay of mules. The postilions by whom they were attended were much more gaily attired than those of France, and though small of stature, seemed full of life and activity. Before starting, excellent chocolate was served them by a dark-eyed doncella, whose jetty locks were gathered in a single thick tress behind her back.

Once more they were on their way, and proceeding at a good steady pace, for though the mules resolutely refused to gallop, they trotted faster than the horses. The travellers were now in a picturesque country. Before

them, at the extremity of a vast alluvial plain, stood Fontarabia, cresting an eminence overlooking a bay, while inland, on the mountain sides, were groves of mingled oak, chesnut, and walnut.

The cavalcade had passed through Renteria, and were approaching Passage, with its large dock, when they beheld a horseman, whom they took to be a courier, accompanied by a postilion, galloping towards them.

As the person came nearer, however, they perceived that it was young Walsingham Griesley, secretary to the Earl of Bristol, charged, no doubt, with despatches from his master to the King of England.

Griesley could scarcely believe his eyes when he beheld the prince and Buckingham, and they both laughed heartily at the astonishment depicted on his countenance.

"You did not expect to meet us on the way to Madrid, Griesley," cried Charles.

"In truth I did not, your highness," replied the secretary. "I am utterly astounded. But I can guess why you are going thither, and I heartily wish you success. Your highness, however, will find that matters are not so far advanced in regard to the match as you may have been led to expect. I know the purport of the despatches I am conveying to his majesty from my lord of Bristol, and they speak of fresh difficulties which have been thrown in the way by the Conde Olivarez."

"Those difficulties will be easily overcome," cried Buckingham. "Your master allows himself to be duped, Griesley. Things will change when we appear at Madrid."

"I trust they may, my lord," replied the secretary, in a tone that showed he did not anticipate any such result.

"You must ride back with us to Saint Sebastian, Griesley," said Charles. "My lord of Buckingham and myself will add to your despatches to the king. I will also charge you with some messages to his majesty, which can be more easily conveyed by word of mouth than by letter."

"I shall be proud to convey them, my gracious lord," replied Griesley. "I esteem myself singularly fortunate in meeting your highness and my lord marquis, as his majesty cannot fail to be pleased with the good tidings I shall be able to give him of you."

During the ride to Saint Sebastian, Charles and Buckingham had a long conversation with the secretary, and ascertained from him the nature of the difficulties that had arisen; but these they were both disposed to treat very lightly.

On arriving at Saint Sebastian, they put up at the Parador de Postas, and the despatches being prepared, Griesley started once more on his journey.

After an hour's rest, our travellers pursued their way through a beautiful and romantic country to Tolosa, where they passed the night.

XIX.

THE GORGE OF PANCORBO.

NEXT morning the unwearied party started again. Several days of hard travel were still before them ere they could reach their destination, and their powers of endurance were likely to be tested to the utmost by rough roads and obstinate mules that threatened to dislocate their joints. However, they held on gallantly and unflinchingly. Through long valleys—by the side of rushing streams—up precipitous mountains—down steep and dangerous descents—across wide, dreary plains they went, frequently encountering bands of muleteers armed with trabucos, and conducting strings of gaily-caparisoned mules laden with heavy pack-saddles, but though hearing much of robbers, and occasionally meeting suspicious-

looking personages in the mountain passes, they had hitherto escaped attack.

On the evening of the third day after quitting Bayonne they reached Miranda de Ebro, where they rested for the night, and proceeding next morning through the valley of the Oroncillo, they entered the Gorge of Pancorbo, a gloomy ravine hemmed in on either side by mountains, and enclosed by rugged rocks, between which rushes the Oroncillo.

While the travellers were threading this savage pass, and gazing at the tremendous precipices that threatened to topple on their heads, they were startled by the report of fire-arms, evidently proceeding from the lower part of the gorge, which was concealed from view by a huge projecting rock.

"What mean those shots?" cried Graham, who was somewhat ahead of the party.

"Ladrones, señor caballero!" returned one of the postilions, crossing himself. "Saints preserve us, they are plundering some travellers, perhaps murdering them!"

Without a word more, Graham applied spurs to his mule, and rode on as fast as he could.

On passing the rock, which screened the lower part of the ravine from view, he beheld a spectacle that roused him to still greater exertion. About two hundred yards lower down, where the gorge was somewhat wider, though the rocks were still precipitous, the torrent was crossed by a picturesque wooden bridge, close beside which, on the opposite side of the stream, was a large travelling-carriage, surrounded by banditti, who were now actively engaged in rifling it of its contents.

The postilion and an old attendant had been shot, probably at the time when the report of fire-arms reached the ears of our travellers, and their bodies were lying on the ground near the carriage. The traces had been cut, and the mules removed to a little distance from the vehicle.

On the other side of the carriage, guarded by a couple of brigands, stood an old hidalgo, for such his appearance

and attire proclaimed him. He had been wounded in the attack, and was binding a handkerchief round his arm. Graham's attention, however, was diverted from the hidalgo by loud shrieks from the bridge. Two ladies, who it appeared had escaped from the clutches of the brigands, and were flying across the bridge, had just been recaptured, and now made the rocks ring with their screams. One of them, who struggled violently with her captor, was young, beautiful, and richly dressed, and was, no doubt, the hidalgo's daughter. The other, who was much older, might be her dueña. As Graham hurried on to the rescue of the affrighted ladies, both bandits discharged their pistols at him, but they were too much embarrassed by their captives to take good aim. Graham replied with better effect. Both robbers were hit by his shots. One of them rolled into the torrent, and the other released his prey and fled. Thus liberated, the ladies flew towards their preserver, and met him just as he reached the foot of the bridge. The younger of the two, who was half wild with terror, with her dishevelled locks hanging about her shoulders, called out piteously,

"My father! my dear father! save him, señor! It is the Conde de Saldana."

"Your father shall soon be set free, señorita. My friends are at hand," said Graham, pointing to the advancing troop.

"Calm yourself, Doña Casilda," cried the dueña; "calm yourself, my child. The saints on whom we called for aid have brought this noble caballero to deliver us from a fate worse than death."

"Do not stay here, señorita," cried Graham. "You are exposed to danger. Take shelter behind yon rock. I will soon bring your father to you."

"Thanks! oh thanks, señor," exclaimed Doña Casilda, with a grateful glance at her preserver. And, accompanied by the dueña, she flew to the place of refuge which had been pointed out to her.

At the same moment the cavalcade came up.

Meantime, the brigands, alarmed by the appearance of such a force as the travellers presented, had seized their firelocks, and, rushing towards the bridge, seemed determined to prevent the cavalcade from crossing it. Fearing that mischief might occur to the prince, Graham besought him to hold back, but Charles would not be stayed, and calling to the others to follow him, prepared at all hazards to drive the robbers from the bridge.

Fortunately at this moment shouts were heard farther down in the gorge, and a small detachment of musketeers was seen hurrying to the scene of action. At this sight, finding they would soon be outnumbered, and would also be attacked in rear and front, the brigands turned and fled, quickly disappearing among the rocks. So precipitate was their flight, that they were unable to take any of the booty with them.

Two of the band, however, aided by a black-visaged ruffian, who appeared from his air of command to be the captain, endeavoured to carry off the Conde de Saldana, probably hoping to obtain a large sum for his ransom. Seizing the old hidalgo by the arms, they tried to drag him off, while the captain, holding a poniard to his breast, threatened, with terrible oaths, to stab him to the heart if he resisted.

In this manner they succeeded in dragging him among the rocks, and might have got clear off with their prey, if Graham had not come to his assistance. Firing at the robber chief, and wounding the villain, Graham sprang from his mule and bounded up the rocks. The robbers did not await his approach, but, releasing the Conde de Saldana, made good their retreat. Graham did not attempt to pursue them, neither did he bestow any thought on their leader, who was lying on a shelf of rock, but assisted the old hidalgo to descend.

By this time Charles and his companions had come up, and a few moments later the musketeers arrived on the spot, and after securing the wounded captain, and binding him hand and foot, they scrambled up the rocks in search of the rest of the band.

It appeared that these musketeers had just arrived at the village of Pancorbo, which lay at the end of the gorge, about a quarter of a league off, when the sound of fire-arms had brought them to the scene of attack.

As may well be supposed, the old hidalgo's first inquiries were for his daughter, and he was not kept long in suspense in regard to her safety. Impelled by curiosity, which was stronger than their fears, Doña Casilda and her dueña ventured from their place of refuge, and finding that the robbers had been driven off, they hurried across the bridge, and arrived at the spot where the carriage was left at the precise moment that the Conde de Saldana was brought there by Graham.

Uttering a cry of delight, Doña Casilda threw herself upon her father's neck, while the old hidalgo, in his delight at beholding her, forgot his wound and all that had befallen him. Not to interrupt their meeting, Charles and his attendants moved away to a short distance.

"How have you been preserved, my child?" cried the old hidalgo, as he recovered from his emotion.

"Señora Engracia and myself were rescued by this gentleman," replied Doña Casilda, pointing to Graham.

"He was also my deliverer," said the Conde de Saldana. "Señor," he added to Graham, "may I ask to whom we are thus greatly indebted?"

"I am Sir Richard Graham, an English gentleman, Señor Conde, and am on my way to Madrid," replied the young man.

"You have done me an incalculable service, Sir Richard," said the old hidalgo. "I rejoice to learn that you are travelling to Madrid. You will find a home, if you please, at the Casa Saldana. I will also introduce you to the court of our young king, Felipe IV. My daughter and myself are on our way to Madrid, and were posting from Miranda to Burgos when this attack occurred. Heaven be praised it is no worse!"

"But you are wounded, father!" cried Doña Casilda.

"It is but a trifling hurt," replied the hidalgo. "I will get it dressed by the barber-chirurgian at Pan-

corbo. These are your friends, Sir Richard?" he added, as Charles and Buckingham approached.

"Friends and compatriots," replied Graham.

The old hidalgo courteously saluted them, and thanked them warmly for the assistance they had rendered him. Though evidently much struck by the distinguished appearance of the prince and Buckingham, he forbore to inquire their names. He afterwards, however, told his daughter that he was confident they were persons of the highest rank.

The exertions of the whole party were now directed towards enabling the Conde de Saldana and his daughter to proceed on their journey. Luckily, the mules were uninjured, and they were speedily harnessed to the carriage by ropes. All the articles scattered about by the brigands were quickly collected together and replaced in the coffers, and everything being rearranged as well as circumstances permitted, the old hidalgo, with his daughter and the dueña, once more took their seats in the carriage. The place of the unlucky driver who had been shot by the brigands was supplied by one of the postilions in attendance upon our travellers, and all being settled at last, the whole party proceeded to Pancorbo—Charles and his companions forming an escort to the carriage.

At Pancorbo, the Conde de Saldana alighted to have his wound dressed, and here our travellers took leave of him and his daughter, and pursued their journey to Burgos.

"We shall hope to see you on our arrival at Madrid, Don Ricardo," said Doña Casilda, as she bade adieu to Graham.

"I shall not fail to present myself, señorita," he replied. "But perhaps you may have forgotten me by that time."

"I am not so ungrateful," she said, fixing her magnificent black eyes somewhat reproachfully upon him. "Hasta la vista, señor!"

"Adios, señorita!"

XX.

HOW SIR RICHARD GRAHAM MET WITH AN ADVENTURE IN THE
CATHEDRAL OF BURGOS.

JUST at sunset the travellers approached Burgos. On quitting Pancorbo they had made the best of their way across broad plains, over steep and barren mountains, and through narrow valleys, obtaining fresh relays of mules at Briviesca, Rodilla, and Quintanapalla. At eventide, as we have said, they drew near the old capital of Old Castile.

From its associations with the renowned *Ud Campeador*, Burgos possessed strong interest for our romantic and chivalrous prince, and it was not without emotion that he first caught sight of the twin spires of its incomparable cathedral.

Ere long, as he gained an eminence, the whole of the ancient and picturesque city rose before him—its old walls, its gates, its proud castle, its countless towers and steeples brought out in black relief against the glowing sky.

Above all these structures, like a giant amid a host of pigmies, domineered the gigantic cathedral. All the upper part of the fabric—the mighty roof, the noble central tower with its pinnacles, and the two exquisitely crocketed spires, of which we have just spoken, each springing to a height of three hundred feet—could now be clearly discerned.

Between the travellers and Burgos lay the Vega, a fair and fertile plain, richly wooded in the part adjacent to the city, and watered by the river Arlanzón, now crimsoned by the setting sun. Crowning a hill about half a league from the eminence on which the prince had halted to survey the scene, stood the Cartuja de Miraflores, a magnificent convent, built in the fifteenth cen-

tury, in the purest Gothic style, and which had served as a mausoleum for the old monarchs of Castile.

Charles remained rapt in contemplation of this beautiful prospect, until the shades of night, which came on too quickly, shrouded it from his view. Even in the gloom he could distinguish the giant mass of the cathedral, and the still shining Arlanzon flowing through the wooded Vega.

After traversing a bridge across the river, and passing through a lofty gateway, the cavalcade entered the city, and proceeded along several streets, the houses of which seemed of great antiquity, many of them being decorated with stone escutcheons, and curiously painted.

These streets were only lighted by lanterns hung in front of the shops, or by candles burning before some holy image. But there were plenty of people abroad—dames and damsels draped in mantillas, caballeros muffled in black cloaks, monks, priests, alguacils, officers of the Inquisition, barbers, soldiers, vagabond boys, and beggars without number. In the aspect and deportment of these people—beggars and boys included—the proud Castilian character was displayed. All had a grave, haughty air, and marched like hidalgos. Pride and poverty went hand in hand. A ragged cloak seemed to be accounted no disgrace to its wearer—at least, he did not appear ashamed of it. In the balconies of many of the houses parties of young persons were assembled, and the tinkling of guitars was frequently heard.

The streets being narrow, and, moreover, encumbered by vehicles of various kinds and strings of mules, the progress of the cavalcade was necessarily slow. At last they issued into a large plaza, on one side of which, hemmed in by inferior buildings, stood the cathedral, and thither, as soon as they had secured rooms at the parador, where they alighted, Charles and Buckingham immediately repaired, fortunately arriving in time to witness the solemnisation of evening mass.

Prepared as they were for a wondrous spectacle, the grand coup d'œil offered by the interior of the cathedral

far surpassed any expectations they had formed of it, and struck them with reverential awe. Emerging from one of the aisles into the mighty nave, they stood still for a short time to contemplate the sublime picture. A large portion of the fane was plunged in gloom, but this obscurity added to the effect of such parts as could be distinguished. The twinkling tapers attached to the long line of pillars on either side, though only serving to make darkness visible in the aisles, cast sufficient light on the nave to disclose the numerous figures kneeling on the pavement. These devotees were for the most part women, who, even while reciting their prayers, never ceased to agitate their fans. All, without exception, wore mantillas, and were attired in black. Scattered amongst them were a few men in varied and picturesque costumes.

The grand altar at which the priests were officiating was a blaze of light, and the splendour of this part of the scene was heightened by the surrounding gloom. The prince and Buckingham might have regretted that so many architectural beauties—so many exquisite sculptures and paintings—were hidden from their view; that the glories of the gorgeous painted windows were not called forth by external light, and the charming perspectives formed by the triple rows of pillars in the aisles were only imperfectly revealed; but, such as it was, the picture was perfect of its kind, and delighted them as much as if every detail had been fully revealed.

Moving slowly down the nave, ever and anon glancing between the pillars of the aisles at some lovely but dimly-seen chapel, or pausing to gaze at a painting or statue that attracted their attention, the prince and his companion approached the choir, where the light afforded by the great altar candles was sufficiently strong to enable them to discern the marvellous workmanship of the stalls, the superb retablo, with its spiral pillars and consummately beautiful statues, and overhead the glorious dome, storied with the arms of kings and archbishops—a dome which Philip II. pronounced to be so beautiful, “that it

seemed the work of angels rather than the production of men."

Having examined all these marvels, so far as was practicable under the circumstances—the sacred rites were then being performed at the high altar—the prince and Buckingham glided noiselessly away, and proceeded to the grand Gothic chapel, called the *Capilla del Condestable*—in itself a church—where they beheld a marvellous altar screen and several tombs of extraordinary beauty—chief among the latter being the tomb of Don Pedro Hernandez de Velasco, constable of Castile, and founder of the chapel. They were next taken by a sacristan, who, seeing they were strangers, volunteered to act as their cicerone, to the chapter-house, where they saw, fastened against the wall, an old wooden coffer of great size, and strengthened by bands of iron, described by their conductor as "the Chest of the Cid."

The legend connected with this singular coffer was recounted to them by the sacristan, and was to the effect that the Cid, being in want of money, filled the chest with old armour, and then taking it to a wealthy Hebrew, represented to him that its contents were vessels of silver and gold, and demanded six hundred marks on the deposit, stipulating at the same time that the chest should not be opened till the loan was repaid. The Jew, who was either more credulous and confiding than the generality of his tribe, or had a profound respect for the Cid, accepted the conditions, and counted out the money. Whether the Cid performed his part of the engagement the sacristan could not tell, but he held the stratagem not only to be perfectly justifiable, but praiseworthy. He would have told them other stories of the renowned Gothic warrior, whose name is the boast of Burgos, but they had heard enough, and returned to the body of the cathedral.

Vespers were just over, the great altar candles were already extinguished, and the chanters and sub-chanters were closing the magnificent gilt iron gates of the choir.

Still some light was afforded by the tapers, which were left burning before the shrines and against the ranges of columns on either side of the nave. A few devotees still lingered, as if resolved to remain to the latest moment.

Reluctant to quit the sacred fabric, with the wondrous beauty of which they were quite smitten, Charles and Buckingham were standing near the centre of the nave, gazing around, when they were joined by Graham.

"You are late Dick," said Buckingham, in a low tone to him. "Mass is over."

"I know it. I have been here for some time—quite long enough to meet with an adventure," replied the other.

"An amorous adventure of course," remarked Buckingham.

"Your lordship shall hear. I was standing near the last pillar of yonder aisle, when a lady, while passing hastily by me, slipped a billet into my hands."

"Bah! she mistook you for her lover."

"Very likely," replied Graham. "But, at all events, here is the commencement of an adventure, if I choose to pursue it. I ought to tell your lordship that I had previously seen the lady kneeling before a statue of the Virgin in the Capilla de Santa Ana, and though her features were partly concealed by her envious mantilla, I could make out that she had an adorable countenance, and superb black eyes."

"Was she alone?" inquired Buckingham.

"An elderly dame was with her, whom I took to be her dueña," replied Graham.

"How is the billet addressed?" asked Buckingham.

"It bears no superscription, and I have not yet opened it," returned Graham.

While this conversation took place, two tall cavaliers, wrapped in black cloaks, issued from the aisle on the left, and stationed themselves at a little distance from the party, on whom they were evidently keeping watch.

Their manner quickly attracted Buckingham's attention, and he said to Graham,

"By my faith, Dick, your adventure is likely to have an awkward termination. I'll be sworn that one of those scowling cavaliers, who look as if they would willingly cut your throat, is the lover of the lady from whom you received the billet. Give it him, and explain how you got it."

"Not I—unless he asks for it civilly," replied Graham.

"Well, do as you please. If you have to fight, I will stand by you. The prince is about to depart. Keep near us."

No part of the foregoing discourse had reached the ear of Charles, neither had he remarked the two cavaliers, who now followed them like shadows.

As the party passed out by a side portal, Buckingham observed to the prince,

"I must pray your highness to return to the parador alone. Graham and I have a word to say to yonder cavaliers."

"Who are they?" demanded Charles, noticing the two mysterious-looking personages for the first time.

"I know no more than your highness; but they have had the impertinence to follow us."

"Do not provoke a quarrel, Geordie," said the prince.

"Rest easy," replied Buckingham. "I have no such design. We will rejoin your highness very shortly."

Satisfied with this assurance, Charles quitted his attendants, and proceeded across the plaza towards the parador.

No sooner was he gone than the two cavaliers, who were standing at a little distance watching them, came up, and one of them, in accents of constrained courtesy, said to Graham,

"You have received a billet from a lady, señor. I must beg you to give it me, or I shall be forced to take it from you."

"Aha! you must be jesting, señor," rejoined Graham. "I value the billet too highly to surrender it."

"Voto á Dios! I *will* have it!" cried the other.

no longer able to contain himself. "It was given to you by mistake, señor. It was intended for me."

"So you tell me, señor," rejoined Graham.

"I swear to you I speak the truth. I am a Castilian noble, señor, and my word has never yet been doubted."

"And I am an English gentleman, señor, and never yet brooked an affront," rejoined Graham. "I will not part with the letter unless you can make good your vaunt, and take it from me."

"Básta, señor!" said the cavalier. "Be pleased to follow me to a more retired spot."

"This is a very foolish affair, Dick," observed Buckingham, "and if any harm should come of it, the prince will blame me. I cannot allow it to proceed."

"But I cannot now retreat with honour, my lord," rejoined Graham.

"I am waiting for you, señor," cried the cavalier, in a taunting tone.

"Before we consent to follow you, señor, we must know whither you would take us," interposed Buckingham.

"The place is close by, señor," returned the cavalier who had not hitherto spoken. "A couple of minutes will suffice to bring you to it."

"So far good," observed Buckingham. "We will give you ten minutes to adjust the affair."

"Five will suffice," cried the first cavalier, impatiently. "While we have been talking here the matter might have been settled."

"Vamos, señores, vamos!" rejoined Buckingham, haughtily.

XXI.

THE DUKE DE CEA.

CLOSELY followed by Buckingham and Graham, the two cavaliers marched across the enclosure, and passing through an open gateway, entered the cloisters of the cathedral. The ambulatory was plunged in gloom, so that it was impossible to discern the arched vaultings of the roof, enriched with exquisite tracery, or the many beautiful monuments on the walls. At last the cavaliers came to an opening, where they awaited the arrival of the others, and then the whole party stepped forth into a large quadrangle, which appeared to be laid out as a garden, with a fountain in the centre. The Spaniards led the way along a gravel walk towards the fountain, which was splashing pleasantly on its marble basin, and, having reached a convenient spot, stood still. The cavalier who had challenged Graham then said:

"Here we can settle our quarrel, señor."

"It is too dark," cried Buckingham. "You will not be able to see each other's swords."

"That objection is easily disposed of," remarked the second cavalier, producing a dark lantern from beneath his cloak, and unmasking it.

"You seem prepared for the emergency, señor," observed Buckingham, in a jeering tone; "but perhaps this lantern was intended to light you to the fair señora."

"It may do so when it has served its present purpose," rejoined the first cavalier. "Hold the lantern, señor, I pray you. You shall not say that any unfair advantage has been taken of your friend. Do you use the capa, señor?" he added to Graham.

And on receiving an answer in the negative, he unfastened his own cloak, and instead of wrapping it round

his left arm—a mode of defence then ordinarily practised in Spain—flung it on the ground.

As he did this, Buckingham threw the light of the lantern full upon him, and a tall, slightly-proportioned, and extremely handsome young cavalier was revealed to view. The rich attire of this gallant youth, who could not be more than one-and-twenty, confirmed the assertion he had made as to his rank.

“By my troth, Dick, you have to do with a grandee,” said Buckingham. “Harm him not, if you can help it.”

“I never meant to hurt him,” replied the other.

Meantime, Graham had followed the example of his antagonist, and divested himself of his cloak. Both drew their rapiers at the same moment, saluted, and beat the appeal, carefully watching each other by the light of the lantern, which Buckingham held aloft with a steady hand.

After a few rapid passes, productive of advantage to neither party, Graham, who was a consummate master of fence, felt satisfied that he could bring the conflict to an immediate close, and accordingly, parrying a thrust delivered by the fiery young Castilian noble, he advanced quickly, and before the other could recover, seized the hilt of his rapier with his left hand, and by a strong blow on the blade and a dexterous turn of the wrist, forced the weapon from his grasp.

With a formal bow, he then presented the rapier to his discomfited antagonist, saying:

“Here is your sword, señor, if you desire to renew the fight.”

The young Castilian noble took the rapier thus courteously offered him, and immediately sheathed it.

“I should not be worthy of the name I bear if I could use my sword against one who has given me my life,” he said. “I own myself fairly vanquished, señor.”

“In that case, all hostility between us is at an end, noble señor,” replied Graham. “Permit me to return you the billet which has led to this conflict,” he added, taking the letter from his doublet and presenting it to

the young nobleman. "You will see that it is unopened. I ought to apologise for having detained it, but——"

"No more, señor—no more, I pray you," interrupted the other. "All apologies should come from me. I was to blame for making the demand so haughtily. You have behaved throughout like a gallant gentleman, and it will delight me to improve my acquaintance with you. I pray you to know me as the Duke de Cea, son of the Duke de Uzeda, and grandson of the Cardinal-Duke de Lerma. This is my friend, Don Antonio Guino."

"I am proud to learn that I have had the honour of crossing swords with the grandson of the great Duke de Lerma, and himself, if I mistake not, a grandee of Spain," replied Graham, courteously returning the salutations addressed to him by the two Spaniards. "Your lordship, I am persuaded, will excuse me if, for the present, I must withhold my own name and that of my friend. I am compelled to do so for reasons the force of which you would recognise if they were mentioned to you. But I may state that we are connected with the English court."

"I am not surprised to hear it," replied De Cea, bowing; "and were I made acquainted with your titles, señores, I doubt not they would be familiar to me. The Conde de Gondomar, late ambassador to England, is my intimate friend, and has often spoken to me of the nobles of your court."

"The Conde de Gondomar is also my intimate friend, duke," said Buckingham; "and I hope to see him on my arrival at Madrid."

"Mil santos! a sudden light breaks upon me," cried the Duke de Cea. "And if I should be right in my conjecture, I shall esteem this meeting one of the most extraordinary events of my life. I am De Gondomar's friend, as I have stated, noble señores, and I believe he has few secrets—even state secrets—from me. I am aware, therefore, that he expects an illustrious personage in Madrid."

"I must set you right on one point, duke," rejoined Buckingham, laughing. "I am not the illustrious personage you refer to, neither is this gentleman."

"But there was a third person with you just now," cried the Duke de Cea, "and he answers so completely to the description I have received from De Gondomar of a certain prince, that I could almost swear 'tis he."

"Without admitting you are right in your surmise, duke," rejoined Buckingham, "I may say that the person you imagine to be the prince desires only to be known as Don Carlos Estuardo. My friend here is Don Ricardo, and I am Don Jorge, at your lordship's service."

"I presume you do not stay long in Burgos, señores?" said De Cea.

"Merely for the night," returned Buckingham.

"I ask, because I have a proposition to make which I trust will not be disagreeable to you," pursued the young duke. "I have been brought to Burgos by the little love affair which you have discovered, but I depart to-morrow morning with my friend, Don Antonio Guino, for Lerma, the castle of my grandsire, the cardinal-duke. Lerma is about half a day's journey hence, and being on the direct road to Madrid, you must needs pass it. It will gratify me exceedingly if you will permit me to attend you thither, and furthermore allow me to present you to the cardinal-duke, who I am sure will esteem himself highly honoured if you will pass the remainder of the day at his castle. Do not refuse my request, I beseech you, señores. It will be a kindness to an old banished minister, who, though he has fallen into unmerited disgrace, and has lost the power and influence he once enjoyed, without a hope of regaining it, still takes the deepest interest in all that concerns his royal master. Your visit will be a consolation to him."

"Thus preferred, it is impossible to refuse the invitation, my lord duke," replied Buckingham, "and I willingly accept it on the part of Don Carlos, who, I am sure, will be gratified to behold a minister so illustrious,

well by his noble actions as by his misfortunes, as the Cardinal-Duke de Lerma."

"It becomes me not to praise my grandsire, noble señor," replied the young duke, in a tone of profound emotion. "He has fallen, and there are few to praise him now. But I can say of him, with truth, that he served the late king, Philip III., faithfully and well. He filled the highest post in this kingdom, just as the Marquis of Buckingham fills the highest post in England; and though disgraced, he committed no act to forfeit his royal master's favour. His enemies triumphed over him. But he bears his reverses with dignity, and without a murmur, and is greater now than when in the plenitude of power."

"Your warmth does you honour, my lord," said Buckingham. "The great Duke of Lerma deserves all you have said of him. His acts as a minister are remembered in England, though they seem to be forgotten in the country which has so largely benefited by them."

"I shall not fail to repeat your words to my grandsire, noble señor," returned De Cea. "Your visit will give him new life, and recal him for a time to the world from which he has withdrawn. But I will not keep you longer here," he added, putting on his cloak. "With your permission, Don Antonio and myself will attend you to your hotel."

"Do not trouble yourself further about us," said Buckingham. "We can easily find our way to the parador where we are lodged."

"Nay, I must insist upon escorting you thither," said De Cea. "And I trust you will honour me by a presentation to Don Carlos."

Buckingham readily assenting, the whole party quitted the cloisters, animated by very different feelings from those which they had experienced on entering them, and made their way past the cathedral to the plaza in which the parador was situated.

Arrived there, Buckingham had a few words in private

with Charles, and briefly explained what had occurred. The Duke de Cea and Don Antonio were then presented to the prince, who received them both very graciously, and professed himself delighted at the prospect of beholding the Cardinal Duke de Lerma on the morrow.

"I am infinitely obliged to you, my lord duke," he said, "for the opportunity you are good enough to afford me of beholding so distinguished a personage as your grandsire."

"You are too good, señor," returned De Cea, bowing low. "The obligation is entirely on my side."

Charles then pressed the duke and his friend to stay and sup with him, but they respectfully begged to be excused, and Buckingham came to the rescue, significantly observing, "Do not urge the duke further. I know he is better engaged."

"Nay, then I will say no more," remarked Charles, smiling. "Will it be agreeable to your lordship to start so early as eight o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"It will suit me perfectly," replied De Cea. "After matins, which I have promised to attend at the cathedral, I shall be perfectly free."

"Do not hurry yourself, duke," laughed Buckingham. "We will wait for you."

De Cea and Don Antonio then took their departure, and shortly afterwards Charles and his attendants sat down to supper.

XXII.

HOW THE DUKE DE CEA MADE A CONFIDANT OF DON RICARDO.

AT a very early hour next morning, Charles, accompanied by Buckingham and Graham, repaired to the cathedral.

The full beauties of the superb Gothic fane were now revealed to them—the tall twin spires cleaving their way towards heaven, the three exquisitely carved portals of the grand entrance, the triple-shafted aisles, the majestic nave, the vaulted roof, the numerous chapels with their monuments, statues and paintings, the magnificent choir with its splendidly gilt gates, beautiful stalls, and glorious canopy—all these, and a thousand beauties more, were displayed to their ravished gaze. To complete their satisfaction, the grand notes of the organ were heard pealing along the roof, while sweet voices arose from the choir.

As on the previous evening, the pavement of the mighty nave was peopled with female devotees, all producing a singular and striking effect, from their black attire, their fans and mantillas; and many of them—the younger at least—boasting magnificent eyes, jet-black locks, and charming features. In the chapels also there were many worshippers; and though the hour was so early, the cathedral might be said to be thronged.

As Graham passed the chapel of Santa Ana he could not help casting a glance into it, and then perceived the beautiful creature he had seen there on the previous night. She was kneeling before the image of the Virgin, and not far from her stood the young Duke de Cea, so engrossed by the contemplation of his divinity, that he had eyes for no other object.

Charles remained within the cathedral for more than an hour, chiefly employing himself in examining the

many marvellous paintings which he had been unable to inspect on the previous evening, and then, deeply deploring the necessity of departure, he bade adieu to the glorious pile, in which he would willingly have tarried during the whole of the day, and returned with his companions to the parador, where breakfast awaited them.

"I do not think the Duke de Cea will be punctual to his appointment, for I saw him in attendance upon a fair señora as we quitted the cathedral," observed Buckingham, helping himself to a cup of chocolate, which formed the staple of the frugal repast.

"I venture to differ with your lordship," said Graham. "It still wants a quarter to eight. In my opinion, he will be here at the hour agreed on."

Graham was right. Before the cathedral bell tolled eight, the Duke de Cea and Don Antonio, each mounted on a superb Barbary horse, and attended by a couple of lacqueys in rich liveries, likewise well mounted and well armed, rode into the court of the parador.

As they alighted, Charles and Buckingham came forth to meet them, and naturally expressed admiration of their beautiful barbs.

"I am glad you like them," said the young duke. "Though full of fire, they are as easy to sit as a lady's palfrey, and might be reined by a silken thread. You will confer a favour upon me by accepting them."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Charles.

"Do not mortify me by a refusal, noble Don Carlos," cried De Cea. "Keep one yourself, and give the other to Don Jorge."

It was so evident that the generous young noble would have been deeply hurt by a refusal, that Charles could not say nay, but, mounting the barb proffered him, found that the noble animal had all the qualities ascribed to him. Buckingham required no further solicitation, but immediately vaulted into the saddle of the other Barbary courser, which was resigned to him by Don Antonio, and was enchanted with his acquisition.

At this moment a bevy of mules, ready saddled and bridled, was brought out, and as if to prove the value of De Cea's present, the vicious brutes made a most horrible disturbance, kicking, squealing, shrieking, and biting furiously, like wild beasts. Some time elapsed before the refractory animals could be mounted. At last, however, amid a hurricane of imprecations from the postilions, the cracking of whips, and the shrill cries of the mules, whose tough leathern hides resounded with oft-repeated blows, the cavalcade got into motion, and made its way across the plaza, and along several narrow streets abounding in churches, convents, and ancient and picturesque habitations, and swarming with muleteers, priests, friars of various orders, and dark-eyed women draped in mantillas.

At the head of the company rode Charles, with the young Duke de Cea by his side, and the latter called the prince's attention to several remarkable structures as they passed along.

"'Tis a thousand pities you are obliged to quit Burgos without visiting the house of the Cid, and his tomb at the convent of San Pedro de Cardena," observed the duke.

"Time is wanting," replied Charles. "I reverence the memory of the great Gothic hero, but I must be content with beholding the city wherein he dwelt, the proudest recollections of which will ever be associated with his name."

Making an exit from Burgos by the Arco de Santa Maria, the troop traversed a bridge over the Arlanzon, and when half way across, the Duke de Cea called a momentary halt, and directed the prince's attention to the beautiful gate through which they had just passed, and which was decorated with statues of the Cid, Fernan Gonzales, the Emperor Charles V., and other renowned personages.

From this bridge a magnificent view of the city was obtained, with its lordly castle and superb cathedral towering above the other structures. The twin spires and

central tower of the splendid fane, now displayed in all their beauty, again excited the enthusiastic admiration of the travellers. It was with a sigh that Charles gave the word to the cavalcade to move on, and he more than once looked back at those marvellous spires, which continued in sight long after Burgos itself had disappeared.

The country on which they had now entered was bare and uninteresting, and consisted of parched-up plains, with scarcely an object on which the eye could dwell with pleasure, stony mountains, and miserable villages.

At the solitary venta of Madrigalejo, where they halted, they were treated with profound respect by the host, who, as soon as he beheld the Duke de Cea, proceeded to clear his house of a band of muleteers by whom it was invaded, and then besought his more important guests to enter. Proceeding to the comedor, or dining-hall, they discovered on the table a puchero, a ragoût of rabbits, with a mess of boiled chickens and rice, and their ride having given them an appetite, they immediately fell to work on these viands, and in a short time very little was left for the muleteers, for whom the dishes were originally prepared. Having wound up their repast with a few flasks of excellent val-de-peñas, they ordered their horses, and a relay of mules being brought out for those who required them, the party proceeded on their journey, much to the satisfaction of the muleteers.

Buckingham having now joined the prince at the head of the troop, the Duke de Cea fell back, and rode beside Graham. A friendship had already been established between these two young men, whose tastes proved to be perfectly congenial, and after they had conversed together for some time on indifferent topics, De Cea said to his new friend:

"I know you to be a man of honour, my dear Don Ricardo, and I will, therefore, unbosom myself to you, and give you some particulars of the love-affair in which I am engaged, and with which you have been so strangely mixed up. I need not describe the lady, for you have

seen her, and know how lovely she is. Yes, Doña Flor is very beautiful," he added, with a passionate sigh. "I have seen none to compare with her, unless it be her sister. The first moment I beheld her I fell desperately in love."

"I am not surprised at it, duke," remarked Graham. "Like myself, I perceive you are of an inflammable temperament."

"I have often been in love before, Don Ricardo, but this is a grand passion," said De Cea, with another sigh, "and threatens to consume me. I can think only of Doña Flor. I must tell you she is married—married to a grandee—Don Pompeo de Tarsis."

"I hope Don Pompeo is old," observed Graham.

"He is under thirty, and remarkably handsome," replied the duke; "but he has a dreadful temper, and Doña Flor detests him. Though perfectly aware of her dislike, he is foolish enough to be jealous."

"Apparently not without cause," remarked Graham. "Permit me to inquire whether Don Pompeo resides in Burgos or the neighbourhood?"

"He has a mansion in Burgos," replied De Cea. "But he lives chiefly in Madrid, or Valladolid, as he belongs to the court. He is in Madrid at this moment, and you are certain to see him on your arrival, for he is in great favour with the minister, the Conde de Olivarez."

"How comes it, if he is as jealous as you represent him, that he allows his wife to be alone in Burgos?" inquired Graham.

"She is under the care of a dueña and an old servant, who are watchful as dragons," replied De Cea.

"But you have found out a way to put the dragons to sleep—eh, duke?"

"I have gained over the dueña, but not old Basilio. He is incorruptible," replied De Cea. "But, nevertheless, I have ventured to follow Doña Flor to Burgos, and in spite of Basilio's vigilance, by the aid of a rope-ladder have contrived to obtain more than one interview with her."

"But why quit Burgos, if she remains there?" asked Graham.

"It would be useless to stay. I could not see her again. To-day she expects the arrival of her father, the Conde de Saldana, who is travelling from Vittoria to Madrid."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Graham. "Then Doña Casilda is her sister."

"She is," replied De Cea, in equal surprise. "Is it possible that you know Doña Casilda?"

"You shall hear," said Graham. And he proceeded to recount his adventure with the bandits in the gorge of Pancorbo.

"By the black eyes of her I love, this is most strange and incredible!" exclaimed the young duke. "You are a fortunate man, Don Ricardo. Doña Casilda cannot be ungrateful after the important service you have rendered her. But you must not lose time. I rather think her father has promised her hand to Don Christobal de Gavina."

"Diablo!" exclaimed Graham, in a tone of vexation.

"Moreover, I cannot disguise from you that Don Christobal is young, handsome, and rich—he has mines in Mexico—so you see you have a formidable rival. But do not despair, amigo. I know the impulsive nature of my countrywomen, how quickly they are captivated by gallantry and devotion, and I am certain that the courage you displayed in the encounter with the bandits must have produced a strong impression upon Doña Casilda's susceptible breast."

"But she may have already given her heart to Don Christobal," said Graham, in a despondent tone.

"I don't think so," replied De Cea. "At all events, you will have the entrée of the Casa Saldana, and can see her as much as you please. The main difficulty will be with the old Conde. If he has promised her to Don Christobal, he will not break his word. But, after all, love would be a very tame affair without a few difficulties and dangers. I should not be half as much enamoured

as I am of Doña Flor if there were no obstacles in the way."

"That may be very true, my dear duke," replied Graham, laughing, "and, to confess the truth, I did not know that Doña Casilda was so important to my happiness as I now find, since there is every probability of losing her."

"Courage! trust to me, and you shall not lose her," cried De Cea.

"Faith! you are a friend in need, my dear duke, and I thank my stars for throwing you in my way."

"Without me you might possibly fail, that I will allow, my dear Don Ricardo," said De Cea. "I know the manners of my country, which no stranger can perfectly comprehend. Nos otros Españoles are a strange people, as you will find, before you have lived amongst us long. I will lay you any wager you please that you will have less trouble with your suit than Don Carlos Estuardo will have with the Infanta."

"Think you so, duke?" cried Graham.

"I am certain of it," replied De Cea. "To say nothing of the difficulties of the negotiation, which may possibly be overcome by the presence of Don Carlos, his patience will be worn out by the rigorous etiquette practised in our court, and to which he will be compelled to submit. Unless by stratagem—and if he has recourse to it he will be in great personal peril, and will put half a dozen heads in jeopardy—he will never be able to obtain a private interview with his mistress. When they are together in public, she will be as cold to him as the ice of the Sierra Nevada. A princess of the royal blood of Spain is the slave of form. She is brought up in it, till it becomes part of her nature. She can only act, move, think, and talk, as etiquette prescribes. As jealously guarded as a Moorish princess, she cannot even stroll in the palace gardens unattended."

"Sdeath! this will not suit Don Carlos," cried Graham. "He fondly persuades himself that he will pass the best part of each day in his mistress's society."

De Cea indulged in a hearty fit of laughter, and then said, "Dreams—dreams—mere poetical fancies, Don Ricardo. The first interview will dispel the illusion. There is nothing romantic—nothing tender—nothing exciting in a royal courtship in Spain. It is a stiff, formal, insipid—I may say, stupid affair. I will describe what will take place. Cold as a statue, and almost as inanimate, the Infanta will receive her ardent lover—for you say he is ardent—with a frigidity that will at once quell his passion. She will give him her hand to kiss, for that is permitted by etiquette. Etiquette will also allow her to reply—but only in studied terms—to his impassioned address. Then she will become dumb—perfectly dumb—and will presently retire."

"Zounds! duke," cried Graham, "you do not draw a very attractive picture."

"It is not in the slightest degree over-coloured," said De Cea. "I have seen what I describe."

"But is the Infanta Maria really as cold and unimpassioned as you paint her?" asked Graham.

"I do not mean to affirm that. For aught I can tell, there may be a volcano beneath that crust of snow, but Don Carlos will never find it out until she becomes his bride. I hope he may get well through the ordeal. It is more than I could. Three days of such dull work would annihilate me."

"From what you say, duke, the Infanta Maria cannot resemble her sister, Anne of Austria, who is one of the most captivating creatures I ever beheld, and apparently ardent as captivating."

"Pardon me, amigo. The Infanta Maria exactly resembles her sister. Before her union with Louis XIII., the Infanta Ana was just as formal and precise as her younger sister. Her lovely eyes, now beaming with witchery, were then without lustre. Even after marriage, Louis complained of her coldness, and dismissed her old dueña, the Duchess de Villaquieras, and her camarera mayor, Doña Luisa Osorio, both of whom, from their intolerable formality, disgusted his majesty."

"From this you lead me to infer that an equal improvement will take place in the Infanta Maria," observed Graham. "A portrait I have seen of her by Velasquez, which is in the prince's possession, represents her as exceedingly beautiful. But the painter may have flattered."

"Velasquez has not flattered. The Infanta has a charming figure, if it were not too stiff; fine eyes, if she would but use them aright; bright golden tresses, though I prefer locks of a darker shade—such as belong to Doña Flor and Doña Casilda; a complexion dyed like a blush rose—a paler skin is more to my taste; full, ruddy lips, to which I make no objection; and teeth like two ranges of pearls."

"You raise my hopes, duke, which had been cast down by your previous description."

"If Don Carlos has patience, all will be well," observed De Cea, "but he must not imagine that he will meet with a tender reception from his mistress. She will scarcely accord him a smile. And if he should venture to squeeze her hand, she will effectually check the repetition of such an endearment. You must own that we bring up our princesses strictly in Spain, Don Ricardo, and take every care of them before marriage. They ought to make excellent consorts—and perhaps they do. At all events, it is to be hoped that the future Queen of England will do credit to her governors and governesses."

At this juncture, Don Antonio, who had already begun to smoke, and had induced Cottington and Endymion Porter to follow his example, rode up and offered them cigars, or tobacco for cigarettes. As King James was not present to denounce the proceeding by a "counterblast," and as Charles did not share in his august father's abhorrence of the fragrant weed, Graham gladly accepted the offer—so did De Cea, and so did the prince and Buckingham. Consequently, in a few minutes afterwards, the whole troop was smoking, since long before this the lacqueys and postilions had lighted their pipes;

the latter, indeed, had begun to blow a cloud before they left the venta of Madrigalejo.

In this manner, and with discourse such as we have detailed, the party beguiled many a long league, until about mid-day they approached the vast and magnificent castle of Lerma.

XXIII.

HOW DON CARLOS AND DON JORGE VISITED THE CARDINAL-DUKE DE LERMA.

BUILT about twenty years before the period of our story, when its illustrious founder was the most important personage in Spain, and could never have contemplated the reverses that subsequently befel him, the proud Castle of Lerma, from its magnitude, commanding position, and splendour, had an almost regal aspect, well suited to the residence of an omnipotent minister, but little in accord with the retreat of a disgraced favourite. The grandeur and haughty air of the pile looked like a mockery of its owner's fallen fortunes.

The stately structure occupied the brow of a hill rising from out a town belonging to the cardinal-duke, and from which he derived his title, and commanded extensive views over plains watered by the Arlanza. The whole country within view of the castle, and much beyond it, had once belonged to the Duke de Lerma, but the greater part of his vast possessions had been confiscated, and little more than a tithe of his princely revenues was left him. Still the castle was kept up with a splendour befitting the dignity of the cardinal-duke, and the number of his retinue was but little diminished.

Thus, when the cavalcade was conducted by the Duke de Cea through a lofty gateway, sculptured with the armorial bearings of the house of Roxas y Sandoval, into a

spacious court, there issued forth a host of lacqueys in sumptuous liveries, headed by a very important-looking mayor-domo. These lacqueys assisted the travellers to dismount, and by the time they had done so a number of grooms of the stable appeared, who took charge of the horses.

After a few words had passed between the Duke de Cea and the pompous mayor-domo, the latter made a profound bow to Charles and Buckingham, and then ushered the party into the castle, marching before them through a grand entrance-hall full of statues, up a splendid marble staircase, and along a corridor which led to another wing of the edifice, where the state bedrooms were situated.

On reaching this wing, the mayor-domo assigned splendid chambers, each having a couch placed in a deep alcove, to Charles and Buckingham, and other rooms scarcely less spacious to Graham and the others. The windows of these rooms looked out into a charming patio filled with orange-trees, and having a fountain in the centre.

Meanwhile, the Duke de Cea had disappeared, having gone to inform the cardinal-duke of the arrival of the visitors. As De Cea had anticipated, his grandsire was overjoyed by the announcement, and, almost with tears in his eyes, thanked him for the gratification he had procured him.

About an hour later, when the guests had refreshed themselves after their journey, and partaken of a collation, the mayor-domo entered, and, addressing Charles and Buckingham, said that his Eminence was impatient to behold them, and prayed them to come to him, as he was unable to leave his room.

On this they both arose, and, attended by the Duke de Cea, followed the mayor-domo, who led them to a suite of apartments on the ground floor. When they had traversed a large audience-chamber, ornamented by portraits of the Emperor Charles V., Philip II., and his son, the late King of Spain, and where several persons were

waiting for admission to his Eminence, all of whom bowed deferentially as they passed by, the door of an inner room was opened for them by an usher bearing a white wand, and they were introduced by this official into the presence of the fallen minister.

They found the cardinal-duke in a large library, the shelves of which were filled with magnificently-bound volumes. He was seated in an arm-chair near a table covered with books and papers, and his legs, enveloped in a mantle lined with miniver, were supported by a velvet footstool. Behind the chair in which he sat was placed a large screen. Two chaplains were with him at the time, but as the prince and the others entered, they bowed respectfully and withdrew. The usher also retired as soon as he had performed his office, and the cardinal-duke was left alone with his visitors and his grandson.

Though but the wreck of what he had been, the once superb Francisco de Roxas y Sandoval was still a very striking-looking person. As Marquis de Denia, and equerry to the Infante Don Philip, in the days of Philip II. he was accounted the handsomest man of the court. His stately form was now bent, and he was almost deprived of the use of his lower limbs by gout, but he still possessed remarkable dignity of manner, and his features, though stamped by age, and bearing traces of care and suffering, were noble in expression. The outline of his face was as regular as it had been in youth. His pointed beard and moustaches were white as snow, but his brows were black and bushy, and gave great effect to the glances of his keen, penetrating eyes. He wore a scarlet cassock with a cape of miniver, and had a red silk calotte on his head. From his neck was suspended by a blue riband the cross of Santiago. Such was the personal appearance of this distinguished man. His manner combined dignity and affability in an uncommon degree, and may be described as at once courtly and captivating. He could not rise to receive his visitors, who were presented to him by the Duke de Cea, but apolo-

gised for the inattention, and besought them to be seated near him.

"Pardon me if I gaze on you too earnestly, prince," he said to Charles, "but I cannot take my eyes from your countenance. One of the chief wishes of my life is now gratified—gratified when least expected. I desired to behold you, and Heaven has granted my prayer. From the bottom of my heart I thank you for the visit. It is a proof of a generous nature that you do not neglect the unfortunate."

Charles having made a suitable reply to this address, the old man turned to Buckingham, and said, "To you, also, my lord marquis, I must express the great satisfaction I feel at seeing you beneath my roof. I cannot receive you as an equal, for you are in power, and I am not. But I am deeply sensible of the honour you confer upon me. I am the more touched by this visit, because I have reason to fear that it will give umbrage to the Conde de Olivarez, and through him to the king."

"The prince would not be deterred by any such consideration from visiting your Eminence—neither would I," rejoined Buckingham.

"I am infinitely beholden both to the prince and to yourself, my lord," said De Lerma. "But it will pain me if my apprehensions should prove correct. And now, prince," he continued, "suffer me to offer my tribute of admiration to the extraordinary gallantry you have displayed in this enterprise—a gallantry worthy of the best days of chivalry, and which, if there be any of the spirit left that used to animate our nation, must obtain its reward. The Infanta must appreciate a devotion without parallel since the age of knight-errantry. Our young king cannot be insensible to the confidence placed in him, and must turn a deaf ear to the counsels of his minister, who alone has delayed the match. That you have adopted such a step bespeaks a courageous and noble heart. But you have done well. We Spaniards adore gallantry, and when the news of your arrival amongst us becomes known, it will excite universal en-

thusiasm. The whole people will hail you as the lover of their princess, and will demand with one voice that she be given to you."

"I sincerely trust your prediction may be fulfilled, lord cardinal," said Charles.

"Doubt it not, most noble prince," cried De Lerma, his pale and furrowed cheek flushing, and his eye kindling as he spoke. "I should blush for my country, and would forswear allegiance to my king, if it were not so. But Philip, though he has ill counsellors, has a noble heart, and will act rightly."

"He will, if the Conde de Olivarez will only let him," remarked De Cea.

"Throughout the negotiations we have distrusted Olivarez, my lord," said Buckingham.

"And with reason," rejoined De Lerma. "He is the sole obstacle I now discern, for the prince's gallant conduct will have removed all others. Oh! for one hour of my former greatness! The match should then be speedily brought about. Were I, as I once was, the king's chief counsellor, I would say to him, 'Sire, the step taken by the Prince of Wales in coming to us in person, almost without escort, to claim his bride, must be met in a kindred spirit. Delays must be at an end. With or without a dispensation from the Pope, we must give him the Infanta.' And all Spain would ratify my decision."

"In the name of all Spain, I beg to express my entire concurrence in your Eminence's opinion," said his grandson. "The prince ought to have the Infanta, and *shall* have her, in spite of Olivarez."

"I would you were still in power, lord cardinal," said Charles.

"I could serve your highness, my king, and my country at the same time, if I were so," replied De Lerma.

"Few ministers have maintained their position so long as you, my lord," observed Buckingham.

"True, and at the moment when I deemed myself most secure I was stricken down," rejoined De Lerma.

"I am as notable an instance of the instability of great-

ness as your own Cardinal Wolsey. The highest post of this realm was conferred upon me by Philip III., who reposed entire confidence in me, and committed the reins of government to my control. I was then absolute master of the destinies of the kingdom, and laboured zealously—and I trust well—for the glory of my sovereign and the welfare of my country. I cannot reproach myself with any act of oppression or injustice. I distributed favours with a lavish hand, and sought to conciliate my numerous enemies by moderation and kindness. I could readily have freed myself of them by other means. Like your august and sagacious sire, prince, I sought to maintain peace, and succeeded in doing so during my lengthened term of power. Though the royal coffers needed replenishment, I exacted no heavy tributes, and enforced no intolerable imposts. Hence the people loved me—and some few, perchance, love me still.”

“Many—very many!” cried his grandson.

“I hope so,” rejoined the old man, “for I have striven to earn their love. I encouraged agriculture, too much neglected with us since the discovery of the New World, and gave rewards for successful industry. I reconciled the internal troubles of the kingdom, and my crowning triumph was the pacification of Aragon. I was then at the acme of my greatness. The wealth of Spain was at my disposal. No request of mine would have been refused by the king, and if it be a fault to enrich and aggrandise my family, I committed it. Lands and titles were pressed upon me by the king. I made my son a duke and a grandee of Spain. I also made his son, who stands before you, a duke and a grandee. I bestowed large possessions upon the Duke de Uzeda. I did more, I earnestly recommended him to the king, who gave him a portion of the favour which he had hitherto bestowed exclusively on me. Alas! I found a traitor in my own son.”

“Proceed no further with your story, I pray you, my lord,” implored De Cea.

“Nay, I must speak out, Guzman, or my heart will

burst," said the old man, with much emotion. "Be content. You have never forfeited my love. I have forgiven your father for the grievous wrongs he has done me, but I cannot forget them. Let me make an end. Like the great Emperor Charles V., I had ever contemplated passing the latter part of my days in religious seclusion, and being then in a position to ask a cardinalate from the Sec of Rome, I obtained the dignity. But this acquisition was made the means of causing a breach between me and the king, and finding my influence decline, my enemies rose up against me. At their head was the Duke de Uzeda—my treacherous son. He had undermined me with the king. My enemies prevailed. I was dismissed, and the Duke de Uzeda—I will call him son no more—succeeded to my post."

"I wonder not at your anger, my lord," remarked Charles.

"Thus much I could have borne, for I was tired of the world, but what followed was harder to bear," pursued the old man. "Dismissal was not enough. I might be recalled, and therefore my reputation must be blasted."

"But not by your son, my lord—not by your son?" cried Charles, indignantly.

The Duke de Cea would have interposed, but the cardinal-duke checked him.

"I will not be interrupted," he said, sternly and authoritatively. "I will finish my recital. Terrible accusations were brought against me, and I was even charged with poisoning the Queen Margarita. My secretary, Don Rodrigo de Calderon, was seized, imprisoned, tortured, and finally beheaded, and if my enemies had dared to strike the blow, I should have shared his fate."

"It was my father saved you," cried De Cea, throwing himself at his grandsire's feet. "Wrong him not by the thought that he desired your death. He averted the blow."

"Heaven alone knows the secrets of his heart. I cannot read them," said the cardinal-duke, "Be his offences

towards me what they may, I have long since forgiven them, but I will never see him more."

"Oh! say not so, my lord," implored De Cea. "He longs to ask your forgiveness."

"I will never see him again—not even at the last," rejoined De Lerma. "Rise, Guzman. I have no fault to find with you."

Both Charles and Buckingham were too deeply impressed with what they had heard to make any remark, and for some minutes there was a profound silence.

It was broken by the cardinal-duke, who, by a strong effort, recovered his calmness.

"I must entreat your highness to pardon me," he said, turning to the prince. "I have talked too much about myself and my misfortunes. But I thought it might interest you to hear the story of a fallen minister of Spain from his own lips. I do not attempt to defend myself, save from the foul and false accusations that have been brought against me. The acts of my administration speak for themselves. I have been justly punished for my pride and presumption, and humbly bow to the decrees of Heaven."

It was perfectly clear, from the tone in which the latter part of this speech was uttered, as well as from the old man's looks, that his professions of resignation were heartfelt, and consequently they produced a profound impression on his auditors.

"I did not expect such a lesson as I have received from you, my lord," said Charles. "I shall lay to heart the words that have fallen from you, and try to profit by them. You have taught me how to behave under adversity."

"Heaven shield you from it, prince!" exclaimed the old man, fervently. "Heaven shield you! When you ascend the throne of England, may your reign be long, prosperous, and happy!"

"Your history is worth all the homilies I have heard preached against ambition, my lord," said Buckingham, "Be sure I shall not forget it,"

"May it never be necessary for your lordship to recal it!" said De Lerma. "I have found comfort and consolation in religion, from which source alone they are to be derived. Your eyes are yet dazzled by power. But I know its nothingness."

Again there was a pause, for the solemnity of the old man's words impressed silence upon his hearers, and as they raised their eyes towards him, they perceived that his hands were clasped together, and from the movement of his lips they knew that he was silently praying.

When he had done, thinking he had intruded sufficiently long upon him, Charles rose to withdraw. De Lerma did not oppose the prince's departure, but said to him:

"My age and infirmities will not allow me to attend upon your highness as I desire. But I commit you to the care of my grandson, who will exercise the rites of hospitality towards you in my behalf. Attend upon the prince, Guzman, and see that his highness lacks nothing."

Bowing reverently to the old man, Charles quitted the room with De Cea. Buckingham would have withdrawn at the same time, but De Lerma begged him to remain.

From the interview that ensued between them, Buckingham derived much valuable information respecting the court he was about to visit. In depicting the characters of the young king Philip IV. and of the Conde de Olivarez, De Lerma displayed an acuteness and power of observation that astonished his auditor, who rose with a very high estimate of the ex-minister's abilities.

"Beware of Olivarez," said the cardinal-duke. "He is my enemy, and because he is so, you may think I judge him harshly when I say he is treacherous and perfidious, but you will find I am right. He will feign to be your friend—distrust him. He will pretend to promote the match—but be sure that he is secretly opposed to it, and will prevent it if he can. If you can baffle him, you will carry your point; if not, the prince

will have taken this journey in vain, and will go back without his bride."

"I shall not fail to profit by your Eminence's counsel," said Buckingham, rising. "I have trespassed too long on your time."

"Not so, my good lord," said the old man. "I never meddle now with state affairs, and indeed I had resolved never to do so again, but as I am sure this match will be advantageous to my country, and as Heaven has brought you and the prince before me, I should not be a true Spaniard if I did not aid you. Once more, be on your guard against Olivarez. He is as subtle and as deceitful as the enemy of mankind. I know him. With this caution I have done."

So saying, he rang a small silver bell, and the summons being immediately answered by the usher, Buckingham kissed the thin hand extended to him, and retired.

On inquiring for the Duke de Cea, Buckingham was conducted by the mayor-domo to a noble picture-gallery, where he found him with the prince and the rest of the party, who were examining the paintings by Ribera, Zurbaran, Antonio Moro, Juan de las Ruelas, and other masters of the Spanish school, that decorated the walls. A magnificent portrait, by Sanchez Coello, of De Lerma, taken when the duke was minister to Philip II., greatly interested the beholders. They could not help contrasting the tall and stately figure there represented, proud as Buckingham's own, with that of the bent and infirm old man whom they had just quitted.

When the party had sufficiently examined the treasures of the picture-gallery, they proceeded to the tennis-court, the stables, and the orange-garden, and lastly walked forth upon a noble terrace, commanding an extensive view of the plains watered by the river Arlanza. Here they strolled to and fro till summoned to dinner by the mayor-domo.

In the evening the whole party attended vespers in the beautiful and richly-decorated chapel of the castle. The

cardinal-duke was present, having been carried thither in his chair. As he was brought out, at the conclusion of the service, Charles and Buckingham took leave of him, and received his benediction.

That night the prince and the marquis were lodged in a manner more suitable to their rank than they had been since they quitted New-Hall. The couches provided for them were so luxurious, so different from the hard beds to which they had been accustomed of late, that they were both unwilling to arise when called, according to arrangement, at an early hour.

Having partaken of a sumptuous breakfast, the whole party repaired to the court, where their horses and mules awaited them. The Duke de Cea and Don Antonio Guino insisted upon accompanying them as far as Aranda del Duero, and all the party having mounted, Charles and his attendants quitted, with regret, the castle, where they had been so hospitably entertained.

XXIV.

EL CORTEJO.

THE morning was splendid, and gave an almost smiling aspect to the sterile plains they had to traverse. Having obtained fresh mules at Gumiel de Izan, they pursued their course, and at last reached Aranda, a picturesque-looking town, built on the banks of the renowned river Duero, and surrounded by vine-clad hills, one of which was crowned by a sanctuary dedicated to the Virgen de las Viñas.

Making their way through a narrow street running between overhanging houses, with large balconies, many of which were graced by dark-eyed donzellas, they entered the market-place, which presented a curious spectacle, being crowded by country folk in quaint dresses,

Here they alighted at a *posada*, and after an hour's rest the prince and his attendants took leave of De Cea and Don Antonio.

"Adios, amigo," said De Cea to Graham, as the latter bade him farewell. "We shall meet again shortly in Madrid. If I should see Doña Casilda and the old Conde, you may rely on my zeal in your cause. *Vaya usted con Dios!*"

Quitting Aranda by a bridge over the Duero, the banks of which were fringed with trees, and tracking a long and pleasant avenue of Lombardy poplars, the travellers entered upon a tract of country which was little better than a desert. Very wearisome was the journey through this barren district, and Graham sadly missed the lively companionship of De Cea.

As evening came on they approached the Somosierra—a lofty and rugged cordillera separating the two Castiles. As these mountainous passes had an ill reputation, and the travellers had been warned by the Duke de Cea against crossing them at night, the party put up at Cerezo de Abajo, a village situated on an acclivity of the lower part of the sierra.

In the *comedor* of the *venta* at which they obtained accommodation, the travellers found a captain of *arquebuzeros* and his lieutenant, both handsome, active-looking young men, though small of stature.

The host took care to intimate that Captain Mendez and Lieutenant Roque, as he styled them, were engaged in clearing the mountain passes from robbers, and he recommended the travellers to obtain their escort on the morrow.

"The captain has a dozen mounted *arquebuzeros* with him," he said, "and can see you safely across the mountains, if he is so inclined. How say you, captain?" he added to Mendez. "Will you escort the *caballeros*?"

"Readily, if they desire it," replied the captain, courteously. "Command me, *gentil caballero*," he added, bowing to Charles. "Myself and my men are at your service."

"A thousand thanks, captain," replied Charles, "but we will not trouble you. We are well armed, and do not fear attack."

"Take my advice, and don't refuse a good offer, señor!" cried the host. "You may be well armed, but the salteadores won't give you a chance of fighting. They lie in ambush behind the rocks, and the first intimation you will receive of their presence will be a shower of bullets. Besides," he added, with a significant gesture, "El Cortejo is now in the mountains."

"El Cortejo!—who is he?" inquired the prince.

"If you meet him, you won't need to ask the question, señor," said the host. "Captain Mendez will tell you who he is."

"El Cortejo, señor, is a noted salteador," said Mendez. "He was once a caballero—some say a noble—and piques himself upon robbing like a gentleman. He has hitherto escaped me, but he won't do so long, for I have certain information that he is in the Somosierra."

"Ay, there is no doubt he is hereabouts," observed the host, with a sly look. "But don't make too sure of catching him, captain. El Cortejo is far too cunning to allow himself to be trapped."

"What will you say if I bring him here to-morrow night, patron?" remarked Lieutenant Roque, laughing, and slapping the host on the shoulder.

"I shall say you are a brave man, lieutenant," replied the host. "But you won't do it."

"Por las brazas de San Anton! but I will," cried Roque.

"Nay, if you swear it, I will believe you," said the host.

"I have changed my mind, captain, and will avail myself of your escort," said Charles.

"I do not press my services, señor," replied Mendez, "but I think you will be safer with me. You may chance to meet El Cortejo. He has spies in the village—perhaps in this very posada—and may be on the look-out for you. You start betimes to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Soon after six," returned Charles.

"Buen! my men shall be ready."

Meanwhile, supper had been set upon the table by a mozo, consisting of an olla podrida, flanked by a dish of garbanzos and bacon, an estofado of veal, fried sausages, chickens and rice, and a Montanches ham.

To these viands the travellers did ample justice, and before they rose from table they contrived, with the aid of Mendez and Roque, both of whom proved boon companions, to demolish a considerable number of flasks of delicious val-de-peñas—a wine which, the host stoutly asserted, never harmed any man, drink as much of it as he might.

"I shall not put thy assertion to the test, worthy host," said Charles, as he prepared to seek his chamber, while his companions followed his example.

"Buenas noches, señores!" cried Captain Mendez, with a laugh. "Lieutenant Roque and I are going to have another bottle. Don't let any thoughts of El Cortejo disturb your slumbers."

Next morning, as Charles looked forth from his chamber window, he perceived a dozen men drawn up in the court-yard.

The prince thought they did not look much like archers, but then he was not familiar with the accoutrements of the Spanish soldiery. The troopers he looked upon were wrapped in long russet cloaks, and wore sombreros, and each man had a trabuco slung to his saddle-bow. Moreover, as one of them dismounted, Charles perceived that he had pistols in his belt. They were mounted on mules, but had in charge a couple of horses, ready saddled and bridled, which evidently belonged to their leaders.

On descending to the comedor, the prince found Captain Mendez and Roque, and their frank and well-bred manner dissipated any suspicions which the appearance of the arquebuzeros had inspired.

"You will find my men badly equipped, señor," said Mendez. "But they are all brave fellows, and have seen good service."

By this time the rest of the party had assembled. Chocolate was then served by the mozo, and while Charles and the others were partaking of it, Captain Mendez said to his lieutenant,

"Let six of the men ride on slowly in advance. The others can follow us."

Roque went out at once to issue the order, and presently a trampling in the court announced that the troopers were setting out.

Shortly after the departure of the advanced guard, Charles and his companions proceeded to the court-yard, where they found their horses and mules in readiness for them. Captain Mendez was in raptures at the sight of the two barbs.

"I am a judge of horses, señor," he said to Charles, "and I vow to Heaven I never saw anything like these barbs. They are perfect beauties. I am not rich enough to offer to buy one of them, as I know it to be worth three hundred doubloons, but I envy you the possession of such a treasure."

"Were you to offer me a thousand doubloons I could not sell you this barb, captain," cried Charles, as he vaulted into the saddle. "It was given me by the Duke de Cea."

"The duke must have a high regard for you, señor," remarked Mendez. "Your barb came from the same nobleman, I presume, señor?" he added to Buckingham.

Buckingham replied in the affirmative, and patted the arching neck of the fiery little animal.

"Cielo! what it is to be a duke!" exclaimed Mendez.

Shortly afterwards, the whole party having mounted, the cavalcade quitted the venta, and began to ascend the cordillera.

About a quarter of a league ahead, the advanced guard might be seen climbing the rugged mountain-side. Captain Mendez rode beside Charles and Buckingham. Then came Graham, with Cottington and Porter. These were followed by the postilions, while Lieutenant Roque, with the rest of the archers, brought up the rear.

In this way the troop, which, from its increased numbers, presented a very formidable appearance, proceeded for more than an hour. By this time they had mounted to a considerable height, though they still seemed far from the summit of the sierra. The road was now hemmed in by rocks, and in many places seemed well fitted for a robber ambuscade. All at once, Charles, who a few moments before had been watching their progress, lost sight of the advanced guard, and asked Mendez what had become of them. The captain could not tell, but proposed to ride on quickly and ascertain, and invited Charles and Buckingham to accompany him. They complied, and the trio soon left the rest of the cavalcade at a considerable distance behind. Still nothing could be seen of the archers, nor was any answer returned to the repeated shouts of Captain Mendez.

"What the plague can have happened to them?" he cried. "They cannot have been captured by El Cortejo. Where the devil are you?" he vociferated.

"Here, captain," responded a voice from behind a rock close beside them.

"Soh! I have found you at last. 'Tis well! Show yourselves instantly!" cried Mendez.

At this injunction, and as if they had been waiting for a signal, the six arquebuzeros suddenly dashed from behind the rock, and with fierce imprecations and threats surrounded the prince and Buckingham, and presenting their trabucos at their heads, threatened to shoot them if they offered resistance. So far from attempting to check this movement, Captain Mendez drew aside to facilitate its accomplishment.

"Ha, villain!" exclaimed Charles, drawing a pistol and levelling it at Mendez, "thou hast duped us. But thou shalt pay for thy treachery with life."

So saying, he pulled the trigger, but no report followed.

Buckingham likewise tried to fire, but both his pistols snapped.

Mendez laughed loudly and derisively.

"Your pistols have been unloaded, señores," he said.

"They will neither harm me nor my men. You are completely in my power. Possibly you guess who I am."

"I know you to be a robber," rejoined Charles.

"I am El Cortejo, señores," replied the captain, bowing.

After a moment's pause, to allow the announcement to produce due effect, he added, "No harm shall be done you—unless you resist; and in that case you will only have yourselves to blame. I have fallen in love with these charming barbs. You shall give them to me. Do so, and I promise you—palabra de honor, señores—that none of your effects shall be touched, and that neither you nor your companions shall be molested."

"What if we refuse?" demanded Charles, sternly.

"In that case," rejoined El Cortejo, changing his tone to one of menace, "I shall still have the barbs, and shall leave my men to deal with you as they think fit, and help themselves to the contents of your alforjas."

"We had best accept the rascal's proposition, and give him the barbs," observed Buckingham to the prince.

"We are caught in a trap."

"I must beg you to decide speedily, señores," said El Cortejo. "If you allow the rest of your party to come up, I shall not be able to prevent a conflict, and the result will be disastrous to you, for all your fire-arms have been cared for. Will you give me the barbs, or must I take them?"

"Nay, thou shalt have them," cried Buckingham. "And may the devil give thee joy of thy bargain! It cannot be helped. Resistance would be idle," he added, in an under tone, to Charles, who seemed unwilling to comply.

"You are right," murmured the prince; "but it is vexatious to be thus outwitted."

"Better part with the barbs than with our saddle-bags, and, mayhap, with our lives," returned Buckingham. "The knave has got us in his clutches. There is no escape."

"Is the bargain concluded, señores?" demanded El Cortejo, who had been watching them narrowly.

"I have already said so," rejoined Buckingham.

"A word more, and I have done," returned El Cortejo. "In half an hour we shall reach the summit of the mountain. Just before entering the village of Somosierra, there is a little chapel, dedicated to Nuestra Señora de las Nieves. Arrived there, you shall both dismount, and deliver me the barbs. Pledge me your word to do this, and no harm shall befall you."

Charles and Buckingham gave the required promise.

On this, El Cortejo ordered his men to lower their trabucos and fall back, and the injunction was instantly obeyed.

"Now, señores, I must beg you to ride on with me," he said.

As there was no help for it, the prince and Buckingham obeyed. The brigands followed, so as to cut off all communication between those in front and their friends. At last, after a toilsome ride of half an hour's duration, the summit of the mountain was attained, and ere long the miserable and bleak-looking village of Somosierra came in sight. At the outskirts of the village stood the little chapel mentioned by the robber chief.

On reaching this structure, El Cortejo came to a halt. Whereupon, without a word being said to them, the prince and Buckingham dismounted, and gave him their bridles.

"You are men of honour, señores," he remarked, courteously. "I really am sorry to deprive you of these charming animals. I should be sorry, also, that you should think I had treated you unhandsomely. Such conduct is inconsistent with the character I try to sustain. I therefore offer you, in return for the barbs, my own horse and that of my lieutenant. They are not bad hackneys, and at all events are preferable to mules."

Though sorely annoyed, the prince and Buckingham could not help laughing at the proposition, and accepted it.

Just as El Cortejo had dismounted, and was in the act of delivering his horse to Charles, Graham rode up, and as he stared in astonishment at what was taking place, Buckingham said to him,

"Don Carlos and myself have just made an exchange with Captain Mendez, and have given him our barbs for his horses."

"The deuce you have!" exclaimed Graham, in dismay. "What on earth can have induced you to make such an arrangement? The captain is robbing you."

"I'm sure your friends won't say so, señor," remarked El Cortejo, with a laugh.

"No, no, we are perfectly content. Indeed, we esteem ourselves gainers by the transaction," said Charles, as he sprang on the back of the horse ceded to him by the robber chief.

The next moment, Lieutenant Roque joined the group, and at a word from El Cortejo surrendered his horse to Buckingham, and took possession of the barb. Cottington and Endymion Porter looked completely puzzled, but made no remark.

As soon as El Cortejo had mounted the beautiful barb consigned to him, he said to the prince and Buckingham,

"You will not need my escort farther, señores. There are no robbers on the other side of the Somosierra. Vayan ustedes con Dios."

So saying, he put himself at the head of his band, and, attended by Roque, rode back the way he had come.

"Deuce take me if I can understand it!" mentally ejaculated Graham, as he followed the prince and Buckingham towards the venta. "But I half suspect that the rascal who has just left us is El Cortejo."

XXV.

THE ALCALDE OF CABANILLAS.

DURING the halt of the troop at the venta of Somosierra an examination was made, by order of Charles, of all the pistols and carbines, when it turned out that the whole of them had been unloaded. The cartridges in the bandoliers were likewise empty. No explanation of this alarming discovery was offered by the prince and Buckingham, who likewise maintained a profound silence as to what had passed between them and El Cortejo.

On quitting the village, the travellers skirted the snow-covered peaks, which formed the summit of the mountain; and here the cold was intense, but the temperature soon became milder as they descended the southern side of the cordillera. While pursuing their course they came upon a savage-looking pass, where many a murder had been perpetrated, as was shown by the numerous memorial crosses lining the road. However, they passed this "malo sitio" without being attacked. At Buitrago they obtained a fresh relay of mules, and then pushed on to Cabanillas, a small village at the foot of the lesser mountain chain. Riding up to a venta, Charles inquired of the host, who was standing at the door talking to a couple of travellers, whether he could give them aught for dinner.

"Ay, that I can, your worship," replied the ventero, a fat, merry-looking little fellow. "I can give you as good a dinner as you will get between this and Madrid—an olla podrida, fried trout from the river, poached eggs, and a quisado of rabbit."

"That will do," said Charles. "Let us have the repast with all possible despatch, for we are in haste to proceed on our journey."

"I will order it at once, your worship," replied the *ventero*, rushing into the house.

As Charles and Buckingham dismounted and gave their horses to a groom, the two travellers, who had been examining the animals with great curiosity, followed the man to the stable.

Meanwhile, Charles and Buckingham, with their attendants, entered the *venta* and proceeded to the *comedor*, where they sat down, in anxious expectation of the repast. But more than half an hour elapsed and no dinner appeared, when a considerable bustle was heard outside, and the door was thrown open by the host, who, instead of bringing in the anxiously-expected *olla podrida* and fried trout, introduced a stout, consequential-looking personage, whom he announced as Don Timoteo del Molino, *Alcalde de Cabanillas*. The *alcalde* was attended by a couple of grim-looking *alguacils*, wearing long black cloaks, and provided with staves. Behind these officers came the two inquisitive travellers previously mentioned, while a number of muleteers, together with the whole household of the *venta*, male and female, filled up the background.

When the *alcalde* had got within a short distance of Charles and his companions, who arose to salute him, he called out, "Don Melchior, and Don Geronimo, be pleased to step forward, and prefer your charge against these persons."

"We accuse them of having in their possession two horses, of which we have been robbed by the noted El Cortejo," replied Melchior. "We knew the animals the moment we clapped eyes upon them, but we did not venture to claim them till we had obtained your worship's aid."

"You did perfectly right," replied the *alcalde*. "Where and when were you robbed of the horses, señores?"

"Two days ago, your worship, between Robregordo and Somosierra," replied Geronimo. "Our belief is that all these persons are bandits. It is true they have the air of *caballeros*, but then your worship will bear in mind

that El Cortejo affects the manners of a hidalgo, and that several of his band are reported to be ruined spendthrifts of good family."

"I have heard as much," said the alcalde. "Now, picaros, what account do you give of yourselves?" he added to Charles.

"We have no account whatever to give," returned the prince. "We readily admit that we had the horses in question from El Cortejo"—(this admission produced a great sensation, and after it had subsided the prince went on)—"but if these gentlemen can prove their title to them, to your worship's satisfaction, they shall have them."

"Would you have me understand that your captain gave you the horses?" demanded the alcalde.

"El Cortejo was obliging enough to give them to us in exchange for a couple of barbs, each of which was worth a dozen such horses," replied Charles.

"Ha! then you mean to assert that you have been robbed by him?" said the alcalde.

"Not being in a condition to reject his terms, señor alcalde, we thought it best to comply with them," rejoined Charles.

"By San Lorenzo, such appears to be the ordinary practice of El Cortejo," cried Melchior. "He gave us a couple of mules in exchange for our horses."

"Very likely the mules were stolen," observed the alcalde.

"Your worship has hit the mark," cried an arriéro, pressing forward. "They were stolen from me. I have just discovered Capitana and Paquita in the stable, and the poor beasts knew me at once."

"Did you receive anything in exchange?" inquired the alcalde.

"Yes, your worship—a miserable donkey," replied the muleteer.

This reply caused much hilarity among the auditors.

"Holy mother! El Cortejo seems to be at the bottom of it all!" exclaimed the alcalde.

"He is the perpetrator of all the robberies in the Somosierra, your worship," observed the ventero.

"All these worthy and honourable persons appear to have been robbed by him," continued the alcalde. "I am at a loss how to settle the matter."

"I will show your worship how to settle it," said Charles. "Let the two gentlemen restore the mules to the arriéro, and they shall have their horses."

"Por nuestra Señora del Carmen! you have cut the knot of the difficulty, señor," cried the alcalde. "But I am afraid you won't get back your barbs."

"Not unless your worship can capture El Cortejo, and I fear there is little chance of that," rejoined Charles.

"Sooner or later I shall catch him, señor," rejoined the alcalde. "But it appears to me that this matter is at an end. I presume you are content, señores?" he added to Melchior and Geronimo.

"We have good reason to be so," they replied. "We are greatly beholden to these caballeros, and are sorry to have doubted them for a moment."

And, bowing to Charles and the others, they quitted the room.

"I will go and take possession of Capitana and Paquita," said the muleteer, following them.

The alcalde was likewise about to depart, but Charles begged him to stay and partake of their repast, and the worthy man readily complied. Accordingly, the grim-looking alguacils were dismissed, and the room being cleared of all intruders, an excellent dinner was soon afterwards placed upon the table, to which all the party did justice.

Just as they concluded, the ventero rushed into the room in a state of great excitement, exclaiming,

"You have been tricked, señores—shamefully tricked!—and so have I. What do you think?—nay, you will never guess, so I must e'en tell you—those two travellers, who styled themselves Don Melchior and Don Geronimo, are rogues and robbers, and so is the arriéro, Pablo."

"What is this you tell us, Tito?" cried the alcalde,

starting up. "Why, you assured me they were honourable men."

"On my conscience, I believed them to be so, your worship," replied the ventero; "but I have found out my mistake, and it drives me mad to think I could have been so easily duped. They owe me three dueros for meat, wine, and lodging, and have gone off without paying a single cuarto."

"Have they carried off the horses and mules?" demanded Charles, laughing.

"Ay, plague take 'em! they have, señor," replied the host. "They have galloped off towards the Somosierra, and I hope to San Nicolas they may break their necks on the way. Their parting words to me were, 'Tell the caballeros we are gone to join our noble captain, El Cortejo.'"

"Let us after them, señores!—let us after them!" cried the alcalde. "Bring out your best mules, Tito!—bring out your best mules!"

"It is impossible we can accompany you, señor alcalde," replied Charles. "We must be in Madrid this evening. Obey his worship's order, good host, and bring out your best mules without delay—but they must be for us."

"Well, if you are obliged to depart, señores, no more need be said," observed the alcalde; "and I can only wish you a pleasant journey."

Shortly afterwards, the travellers had mounted their mules, and were making their way rapidly across the vast arid plain which lay between them and Madrid.

Their next halt was at Fuencarral, and some two hours later, just as evening was coming on, the walls and towers of Madrid could be distinguished.

Charles uttered an exclamation of joy at the sight, and his enthusiasm and satisfaction were shared by the whole of the cavalcade. For some time no one had spoken, but now every tongue was let loose, and the flagging spirits and energies of the party seemed instantaneously to revive. The mules, too, appeared to participate in the general exhilaration, and, aware that their

journey was nearly at an end, voluntarily quickened their pace, and soon brought their riders to the gates of the city.

A certain feeling of disappointment crossed Charles as he gazed at the reddish-coloured mud walls, garnished with Moorish-looking towers and minarets, that rose before him, and he almost involuntarily exclaimed, "Can this be Madrid?"

"Yes, this is Madrid, your highness," replied Cottington, who chanced to be near him; "but you must not judge of the city by its walls, any more than you would fruit by the husk."

"Were the walls ten times uglier than they are, they would be welcome to me as Mecca to the devout Mussulman!" cried Charles. "But let us not linger outside. The gate stands invitingly open. Follow me, gentlemen."

Having passed through the archway, the travellers found themselves in a park. A wide road running through it soon brought them to a woody valley, which lay between them and the city. At the bottom of the hollow, extending to some distance on either hand, was a broad open space, wherein was collected a great concourse of well-dressed persons of both sexes, who were promenading to and fro as if in a mall. Cottington informed Charles that this pleasant spot was the Prado.

Though tempted to linger within the Prado, the travellers passed through the gay groups, and mounting the acclivity on the farther side of the woody valley, reached the opening of the splendid Calle de Alcalá, which, at this part, might be justly styled a street of palaces.

"At last you are in the 'very noble and very loyal' city of Madrid, as Enrique IV styled it," remarked Cottington to the prince. "The Madrileños say it is the only capital—solo Madrid es corte. Whether it deserves the distinction, your highness will determine hereafter. Shall we go on? The House of Seven Chimneys is hard by."

Proceeding for a short distance along the Calle de Alcalá, the cavalcade, under the guidance of Cottington,

diverged into a narrow street on the right, hemmed in by tall habitations, and eventually reached a small plaza, at the farther end of which was a large sombre-looking mansion, flanked on either side by high walls, evidently enclosing a garden. A feature in this house, which instantly attracted the attention of Charles, as well as of such of his attendants as had not previously seen the structure, was its massive and singularly-shaped chimneys.

"Behold it!" cried Cottington, pointing to the mansion. "Behold the House of Seven Chimneys!"

"Let us count the chimneys, and make sure," cried Buckingham. "His majesty desired precise information on the subject. By Heaven! there are only six."

"Count again, my lord," rejoined Cottington, laughing. "Your eyes deceive you. There are certainly seven."

"No such thing!" exclaimed Buckingham, confidently. "I appeal to his highness and to all present whether I am not right. There are two stacks—and three chimneys in each stack. The house is improperly named."

"We are all of your lordship's opinion," cried those appealed to.

"The designation is perfectly correct," remarked Cottington. "I will back my assertion by any wager your lordship pleases."

"Where, then, is the seventh chimney?" cried Buckingham.

"It is just as visible as the others," returned Cottington.

"To you it may be, but plague take me if I can discern it!" cried Buckingham. "There must be witchcraft in the matter."

"I hope not," observed Charles, gravely. "Give us an explanation of the mystery, Sir Francis."

"That is easily done, your highness," replied Cottington. "It is there," he added, pointing to a cupola in the centre of the building.

A loud laugh, in which all but Buckingham joined, followed this explanation.

"Bah! that is not a chimney," cried the marquis, incredulously.

"Excuse me, my lord, it is the main chimney—la chimenea principal, as the Spaniards say," rejoined Cottington. "There is a curious story connected with that chimney."

"You must find another occasion to tell it, Sir Francis," observed Charles. "We will now enter the house."

"Rightly called, I maintain,—'La Casa de las Siete Chimeneas,'" rejoined Cottington, determined to have the last word.

End of the First Book.

BOOK II.—THE INFANTA MARIA.

I.

THE EARL OF BRISTOL.

WHILE Charles and his attendants were examining the outside of the House of Seven Chimneys, and questioning the propriety of its designation, two persons were seated in a large lofty room on the ground floor at the rear of the mansion.

They had not long returned from the Prado, and their talk was of no very serious or important matters, and chiefly referred to the persons they had met during their promenade. Both of them were very handsome-looking men of middle age, but so different in appearance that it was easy to tell at a glance that one was an Englishman and the other a Spaniard.

In age the Englishman might be about forty-three, and in addition to possessing a tall and graceful figure, and a noble and prepossessing countenance, lighted by keen grey eyes, he had an air of great distinction. His

manners were polished and refined, and from his long residence in Madrid and constant intercourse with the court, he had contracted a gravity of look and deportment befitting a high-born and high-bred Castilian. His dark locks, which were cut short, so as to display a well-shaped head and lofty brow, replete with intellect, were streaked with grey, but his pointed beard and moustaches were still black. His doublet and large trunk hose were of brown velvet, and his mantle of the same material. His throat was encircled by a stiffly-starched ruff, and by his side he wore a long rapier. We need scarcely say that this distinguished personage was the Earl of Bristol, then English ambassador extraordinary to the court of Madrid.

Endowed, as we have shown, with remarkable qualifications both of mind and body, John Digby, who was of an ancient Warwickshire family, and nearly connected with the unfortunate Sir Everard Digby, an actor in the Gunpowder Treason, was well qualified to shine at a court like that of James, where personal graces went for so much. Accordingly, when, after spending some years in foreign travel, young Digby was presented to the king, he was very graciously received, and bade fair to become chief favourite. Quickly appointed a gentleman of the privy chamber, knighted, and made a member of the council, Sir John Digby was sent as ambassador to Spain on two occasions—both of which missions he discharged in a very satisfactory manner. Subsequently he proceeded to Germany to negotiate terms of peace for the Elector Palatine, but though the embassy resulted in failure, its ill success is to be attributed to James rather than his ambassador.

Some years prior to our story, the able and active diplomatist we are describing had been raised to the peerage as Lord Digby, and rewarded for his services by the castle and domains of Sherborne, of which Sir Walter Raleigh had been unjustly deprived; but to give *éclat* to his fourth and last mission to Madrid, the purpose of which was to treat with Philip IV., then newly come to the throne, for the hand of his sister, the Infanta Maria, he was created Earl of Bristol. On his arrival at the Spanish capital,

Bristol, in conjunction with the resident ambassador, Sir Walter Aston, zealously addressed himself to the object of his mission, and, though he encountered numerous obstacles, sufficient progress was made to warrant him in believing that the match would be accomplished. Buckingham, as we have previously shown, hated Bristol, and it was with the design of robbing the ambassador of his anticipated triumph, that the favourite proposed the romantic journey to Madrid, described in the foregoing chapters.

We now come to the Spaniard, who was a much smaller man than Bristol, but well made and very handsome. His complexion was dark, his eyes of the same hue, and his brows and hair jet black. A pointed beard completed the fine oval of his face. His manner was fascinating, but an indefinable expression of cunning pervaded his features. His habiliments, cloak, pourpoint, and hose were of black velvet, and well became his graceful figure. Around his neck he wore the cross of Calatrava. This crafty personage was no other than Don Diego Sarmiento de Acuna, Conde de Gondomar, who had been for several years ambassador at the English court, and by his adroit flattery of the monarch, his bribes to the venal courtiers, and his great diplomatic skill, had been eminently successful in carrying out the purposes of his mission. Admitted to great familiarity by James, and able to approach him at his festive moments, when he was not entirely master of himself, Gondomar had frequently obtained important secrets from the unguarded king. Believing Gondomar to be devoted to his interests, Buckingham kept up a correspondence with him on his return to his own court. It will be remembered that a private despatch from Gondomar, urging Buckingham to bring the prince to Madrid, decided the favourite upon that course of action. Ostensibly, Gondomar was on excellent terms with Bristol, but he consorted with him chiefly for the purpose of reporting his proceedings to Buckingham.

"It is strange there are no despatches from England," remarked Bristol. "For three days I have looked im-

patiently for them, but none arrive. I have had no answer to my letter of the 4th February, and yet it required an immediate response."

"No doubt King James cannot make up his royal mind, my lord," rejoined Gondomar. "We know he is vacillating in his policy."

"But he leaves me in a state of indecision which is very perplexing, and may be prejudicial to our interests," said Bristol. "I speak frankly to you, count, because I know you to be a staunch supporter of the match."

"I desire it as much as any Englishman can do—more so, perhaps," remarked Gondomar. "But there is no reason for uneasiness. The next intelligence you get from England will be satisfactory, depend upon it. Perhaps the courier may have been stopped in the mountains. El Cortejo and his band are in the Somosierra. The last courier from Paris, who arrived two days ago, was robbed of his letters. Your despatches may possibly be in El Cortejo's possession."

"This is a deplorable state of things, count," said Bristol—"really disgraceful to the country."

"It is bad enough, I admit," rejoined Gondomar, "but the evil cannot be remedied. We shall always, I fear, have salteadores in our sierras. No sooner is one band exterminated than another springs up. There have always been the Seven Boys of Eciija. If your despatches should not arrive to-night, I will cause a detachment of arquebuzeros to be sent to the Somosierra."

"You are very good, count. His Most Catholic Majesty owes it to his subjects, and to such as enter his dominions, that the highways be kept clear."

"You forget, my lord, that I myself have been robbed on Shooter's Hill, within half an hour of London," replied Gondomar. "I see little difference between your highwaymen and our salteadores, except that the latter are the bolder villains. But let us change the subject. You were not at court to-day. The king noticed your absence, and spoke of it to the Conde-Duque."

"And what said Olivarez?" inquired Bristol, curiously.

"He could assign no cause, but promised to see your lordship to-morrow; so you may prepare for the visit."

"Heaven grant the despatch may arrive in the interim?" cried Bristol. "I am puzzled how to act."

At this moment the door opened, and a young man came in. This was Harry Jermyn, son of Sir Thomas Jermyn, and the ambassador's chief secretary.

"What news, Jermyn?" cried Bristol, eagerly. "Has the courier arrived? Have you got the despatch?"

"No, my lord," replied Jermyn, whose countenance wore a very singular expression, "but a gentleman is without who has ridden post from London."

"Ha! he may bring a letter, or a message from the king," cried Bristol. "Who is it, Jermyn?"

"He gave a very unpretending name, my lord," replied the young secretary, unable to repress a smile. "He calls himself Tom Smith."

"Tom Smith! 'Sdeath! how should I know him, when there are ten thousand Englishmen so called? Is he a gentleman?"

"He has the air of one, my lord," replied Jermyn.

"Well, admit him."

On this the Conde de Gondomar arose to depart. But Bristol stopped him.

"Stay, count, I pray you," he said. "Tarry at least till I ascertain whether this Tom Smith has any private message for me."

Meanwhile, Jermyn went to the door and called to the person outside, who instantly marched into the room.

Totally unprepared for such an apparition, Bristol did not at first recognise the tall figure in travel-soiled habiliments, and funnel-topped boots covered with dust, as that of the magnificent Marquis of Buckingham, but as the so-called Tom Smith advanced, and came more within the light, the truth flashed upon the earl. Better prepared, Gondomar knew the marquis at once.

"My lord of Buckingham!" exclaimed Bristol, greatly astonished. "Do I indeed behold you?"

"Yes, I am here in person in Madrid, my lord, and only just arrived," replied Buckingham.

"You are heartily welcome," said Bristol. "This is a most unlooked-for pleasure. But Jermyn told me you had ridden post from London. Surely he must be wrong?"

"I have ridden every mile of the way, my lord, and I promise you I found it a devilish long journey," rejoined Buckingham.

"I dare say you did," said Gondomar, cordially saluting him. "I am glad you have got here safe and sound, and have escaped the bandits of the Somosierra."

"I can give the last news of them," replied Buckingham. "I have been robbed by El Cortejo. I did not lose much by him, though, and I must say he conducts his nefarious business like a gentleman."

"I have so many questions to ask your lordship, that I scarcely know where to begin," said Bristol; "but my first dutiful inquiries must be in regard to my liege lord the king, and our gracious prince. How fare they both?"

"Both well," replied Buckingham. "The king was in his wonted health when I took leave of him in Whitehall. And as to the prince—why he can speak for himself."

"What! is his highness here?" cried Bristol, in extremity of surprise.

"My brother Jack, who represents him, is in the ante-chamber," replied Buckingham.

"Heaven and earth! can it be? I am lost in wonder!" cried Bristol. "Why did you not tell me this before, my lord? I fly to his highness."

"Stay where you are," rejoined Buckingham. "I will summon him. Prithee come in, brother Jack," he added, calling at the door.

Charles forthwith entered the room. His habiliments and boots, like those of Buckingham, gave evidence of the long journey he had undergone; but his looks did

not manifest much fatigue, and his deportment was as dignified as usual.

As he came in, Bristol and Gondomar instantly threw themselves at his feet, and expressed the liveliest satisfaction at beholding him. Thanking them for their welcome in the most gracious terms, Charles raised them, and said to Bristol, with a smile, "You did not expect to see me here, my lord?"

"In truth I did not, your highness," replied the earl. "I never dreamed of such an event. But the unexpectedness of your arrival heightens my joy at beholding you."

"You can guess what brings me to Madrid—eh, my lord?" said Charles, with a glance at Gondomar.

"Your highness can have but one errand," replied Bristol, bowing low.

"Yes, the motive of your highness's journey is easily divined," remarked Gondomar. "The most chivalrous prince in Europe is come in person to claim his bride. Such an act of gallantry and courage, performed by a private gentleman, would excite our admiration—how much, then, must we be moved, when the caballero andante is heir to a throne!"

"Without taking too much credit to myself, count," said Charles, "I may say that the journey has been attended with some little peril, and with some obstructions, as I will hereafter recount to you. I have travelled from London incognito, under the simple name of Jack Smith, and my lord marquis here has played the part of my brother Tom. We have only been known by those names throughout the journey. Our escort has been slight, consisting merely of Cottington, Endymion Porter, and Dick Graham—all of whom are here. As you will naturally suppose, we have had some strange adventures by the way, and, indeed, have courted them rather than shunned them."

"That I can readily believe," remarked Bristol.

"Twice or thrice we have fallen among robbers, and have even been taken for robbers ourselves," pursued

Charles; "and to give you an idea of the horses and mules, good, bad, and detestable, that we have ridden, would be impossible. But, on the whole, we have had a merry time of it. Have we not, brother Tom?"

"The merriest three weeks I have ever known, brother Jack," replied Buckingham. "I am only sorry the journey is at an end."

"I cannot go quite so far as that," said Charles, "but I shall always look back to it with pleasure."

"There is only one thought that mars my delight at beholding your highness," remarked Bristol, somewhat gravely. "Forgive me if I venture to inquire whether this journey has been undertaken with your royal father's sanction?"

"That question, which should never have been asked, my lord," interposed Buckingham, haughtily, "is sufficiently answered by his highness's presence here—and by my presence."

"Make yourself quite easy, my good lord," said Charles, kindly, to Bristol. "I had his majesty's entire sanction for the journey. I have letters from him to yourself, to Sir Walter Aston, and to the king."

"I am glad to receive that assurance from your highness's lips," rejoined Bristol. "Knowing your august father's tender love for you, I could scarcely conceive that he would allow you to incur such risks. I am sure he never consulted the council."

"His majesty felt it to be necessary for the success of his plans that the prince should repair to Madrid," observed Buckingham, with cold significance; "and, being certain that the journey would be opposed by the council, he kept it secret. To me, my lord, he entrusted the precious charge of his son."

"Am I to understand that his majesty is dissatisfied with my conduct?" said Bristol, in a tone that showed how much he was hurt.

"You will understand that henceforward the treaty is under my management," rejoined Buckingham, imperiously.

"Then I am superseded?" cried Bristol.

"You have a master," said Buckingham.

"A master in you, my lord—not so," rejoined Bristol, with equal haughtiness.

"In the prince," said Buckingham.

"I acknowledge his highness," said Bristol; "but you my lord—never!"

"That remains to be seen," muttered Buckingham.

"A truce to this, my lords," said Charles. "Let not my arrival at Madrid be marked by a misunderstanding between you. You have been over-hasty, Geordie. My royal father and myself fully appreciate your services, my good lord," he added to Bristol; "and it is from no distrust of your zeal, either on the king's part or my own, that I have come here. His majesty felt that my presence must bring the matter to a speedy issue. But I shall be guided by your advice."

Bristol bowed deeply, but was too much moved to make any other reply.

"Your highness may command me in every way," said Gondomar to Charles. "I am an Englishman at heart, and will serve you as faithfully as one of your own subjects."

"I shall not hesitate to put your zeal to the test, count," rejoined Charles. "To-morrow you shall make known my arrival to Olivarez."

"It will surprise him as much as it has surprised me," observed Bristol.

"And perhaps be equally displeasing to him," muttered Buckingham.

"It will gratify me to obey your highness's commands," said Gondomar. "I will not venture to predict what will follow the announcement, but I am sure to-morrow will be a day of rejoicing, such as has rarely been witnessed, at our court. And to one person whom I forbear to mention, the news of your arrival will be more welcome than words can tell."

"She ought to be the first to know it," cried Charles, eagerly. "Can it be so managed?"

"The task is difficult and dangerous; but I must prove my devotion to your highness, and I will," said Gondomar. "The Infanta shall know of your arrival to-night. Nay, more, you shall see her, if you are so minded."

"The grand object of my journey will then be accomplished," cried Charles, transported with delight.

"Ah! but you may not be able to exchange a word with her," said Gondomar. "Your highness must consent to be entirely under my control. The slightest imprudence on your part would destroy me. Ask my Lord Bristol, and he will tell you how rigorous are our notions of etiquette, and how great will be the hazard I shall incur."

"Most assuredly you will risk disgrace, count," rejoined Bristol. "Let me dissuade your highness from the step."

"The adventure is too much in accordance with my wishes to be resisted," said Charles. "I will consent to anything, count," he added to Gondomar, "provided I can obtain sight of the Infanta."

"In that case you must accompany me to the palace," said Gondomar. "You need make no change in your attire. When there, I will find you a disguise. I engage that you shall see the Infanta, but I rely on your discretion."

"You may entirely rely upon it," rejoined Charles.

"We will go at once," cried Gondomar.

"Hold, prince!" cried Bristol, throwing himself upon his knees, and catching hold of Charles's cloak, "I entreat you not to take this rash step. The chances are a hundred to one that you are discovered, and if so, the treaty will be effectually broken. Besides causing a great scandal which can never be forgiven, you will inevitably bring disgrace and ruin on the Conde de Gondomar."

"Do not think of me, your highness," said Gondomar. "I am ready to go with you at all hazards. You have set us all such an example of courage and gallantry, that we are bound to imitate it. I shall be proud to play a small part in this romantic adventure."

"You will play a very important part in it, if you bring me to her I love," said Charles.

"Listen to me, prince, I implore you!" cried Bristol, earnestly. "Do not despise my counsels, or you will repent it."

At this moment Buckingham approached the prince on the other side, and whispered in his ear, "Go!"

"I mean to do so," replied Charles, in the same tone.

"Rise, my good lord," he added to Bristol. "I know that your advice is well meant, but I cannot follow it. You make no allowance for a lover's impatience. An opportunity presents itself to me of seeing the Infanta—think you I will neglect it?"

"My lord of Buckingham, I must appeal to you for aid," said Bristol, earnestly. "The prince has been entrusted to your charge by your sovereign master. You have the greatest influence with his highness. Exert it now, and prevent this rash step."

"I am not disposed to regard the matter in the same serious light as yourself, my lord," replied Buckingham, indifferently. "Besides, the prince is a knight-errant."

"You will be answerable for any ill consequences that may ensue," said Bristol, sternly.

"I am content to bear the responsibility," returned Buckingham, throwing himself with an air of great nonchalance into a chair.

"Good night, my lords," cried Charles. "We shall meet early in the morning."

"Long ere that, I trust," said Bristol. "Think not I shall retire to rest till I know that your highness has safely returned."

"I am perfectly easy," laughed Buckingham. "I know that Gondomar will take good care of your highness, and I shall, therefore, go to bed as soon as I have supped. Buena fortuna!"

Charles and Gondamar then prepared to quit the room, but Bristol stopped them.

"Hold a moment!" he cried. "Since your highness is resolved to go in spite of my remonstrances, I pray you

to leave the house privately, so that none may know of your departure. I will make some excuse to your attendants, and give them to understand you have retired to rest. It is of the last consequence that your visit to the palace be kept secret."

"There your lordship is perfectly right," said Gondomar. "Every precaution should be taken to ensure secrecy. The visit must not even be suspected."

"To guard against that risk," said Bristol, "do you, count, pass forth as is your wont, and when you are out of the house repair to the garden gate, where I will bring his highness presently. You know the place?"

"Perfectly," replied Gondomar.

And with a significant glance at Buckingham he quitted the room.

As soon as he was gone, the Earl of Bristol opened a window which communicated by a short flight of steps with the garden. Descending by this outlet, the prince gained a broad gravel walk, bordered by a parterre, adorned with oleanders, myrtles, and other flowering and fragrant shrubs. The garden was of considerable extent, and appeared to be charmingly laid out in the formal taste of the period, with clipped alleys and beds of flowers, and boasted some tall cypresses, and two extraordinarily large mulberry-trees, which are even now in existence. The night was calm, the stars shone brightly in the deep blue heavens, the moon was in her first quarter, and hung like a crescent on high. All was hushed in repose, and the silence was only broken by the nightingales amid the trees. Viewed from the garden, whence its full size could be discerned, the mansion presented a very imposing appearance.

"You are well lodged here, my lord," said Charles, looking back at the house.

"I have no cause for complaint," said Bristol. "There is a good garden, as you see; and though the House of Seven Chimneys is not so large as York House," he added to Buckingham, who had come out with them, "it is large enough for me."

"Are there seven chimneys, my lord?" cried Buckingham. "I doubt it, for I have counted them."

"Most certainly there are," replied Bristol. "It is no misnomer. I will convince you of the fact to-morrow. Your lordship is not the only person puzzled by it. Originally there were only six chimneys, but a seventh was built in jest."

"Under what circumstances?" demanded Charles.

"Your highness shall hear when you have leisure to listen to the story," replied Bristol. "We are now at the gate."

With this, he unlocked the door. Posted on the other side of it they found Gondomar.

"Your highness can come forth," said the latter. "The coast is quite clear."

"Take the key with you," said Bristol, delivering it to the prince. "Return this way. I will be on the watch for you. I shall not know a moment's peace till I behold you again. Heaven guard your highness!"

Charles then passed out, and having secured the door, accompanied Gondomar along a narrow lane running between high walls, the outer of which skirted the convent of San Geronimo.

On reaching the plazuela, in front of the House of Seven Chimneys, they found Gondomar's coach, and, immediately entering it, were driven along the Calle de Alcala and the Calle Mayor, to the grand plaza in which stood the royal palace.

II.

OF THE MEETING BETWEEN CHARLES AND THE INFANTA MARIA.

THE old Palacio Real of Madrid, to which our story refers, must not be confounded with the existing palace, which, comparatively speaking, is a modern building, being only completed about a hundred years ago. The ancient structure was, in fact, the Moorish Alcazar, and had been the abode of the Caliphs till they were driven from New Castile to Granada. It was first occupied as a palace by Enrique IV., towards the close of the fifteenth century, but few changes were made in it till the time of Charles V., when the pile was partially rebuilt and enlarged, and its original character materially destroyed. Philip II. may be said to be the first Christian monarch who dwelt within the Alcazar of Madrid, for until the completion of the Escorial, in 1584, he made it his chief residence. Not till the reign of this gloomy monarch did Madrid itself become the capital of Spain, and from the same epoch must be dated the importance of the city. Few changes were made in the Alcazar by Philip III., who was perfectly content with the palace bequeathed to him by his illustrious sire; and Philip IV. had as yet been too short a time on the throne to attempt any improvements. Though heterogeneous in its architecture, and certainly not so beautiful as it had been in the days of its Moslem rulers, the royal palace of Madrid was a vast and magnificent pile, occupying a most commanding position on the heights overlooking the valley of the Manzanares. Immediately beneath the royal edifice, extending from the foot of the eminence on which it stood to the banks of the river, was the Campo del Moro, part of which was laid out as gardens.

Viewed either from the grand plaza, from the valley, or from afar, the palace presented a most striking and

picturesque appearance. It was entered by two Moorish gates, the beautiful architecture of which was happily undisfigured, and the buildings surrounding the spacious court were studded with cupolas and minarets. Above these towered the ancient keep, with its zig-zag battlements and turrets at each angle. Besides a number of small courts, the palace comprehended a superb patio, surrounded by apartments, laid out in the Arabian style. Such were the principal features of the Alcazar, as it was still generally called. Opportunities of examining it more in detail will occur as we proceed.

The coach of the Conde Gondomar was instantly admitted into the outer court of the palace by the warders stationed at the gate. In this court several carriages were drawn up, and the place was crowded with lacqueys in magnificent liveries, grooms of the stable, arquebusiers, alabarderos, and footmen holding torches that cast a ruddy glare on the walls. On alighting, Gondomar and the prince entered the palace by the grand portal, in front of which a guard was stationed; but instead of mounting the grand staircase, they passed through a door at the rear of the spacious vestibule. Charles now found himself in a long passage, dimly lighted by lamps hung at distant intervals. Evidently communicating with the apartments of the various subordinate officers of the royal household, this passage brought them to a back staircase, mounting which, they came to an upper corridor, containing the lodgings of the *meninos*, or pages, appointed to attend upon the queen and the Infanta. This corridor was lighted in the same manner as that on the ground floor, and as Gondomar traversed it, he counted the doors on the right hand, and stopping at the ninth, opened it. The room was vacant, but a lamp was burning on the table, and the noise caused by their entrance brought out from the inner room a tall, handsome young man, attired in a doublet and mantle of orange-coloured satin, embroidered with gold. The *menino*—for such he was—expressed his surprise by his looks, but he made no remark.

"I want you to do me a service, Pepe," said Gondomar.

"Your lordship has only to command me," replied the menino, bowing.

"It is a very simple matter, and will give you no trouble," said Gondomar. "All I wish you to do is to lend this caballero a dress."

"With the greatest pleasure," returned Pepe. "Pray step this way, señor, and you shall choose one for yourself."

"Hold a moment, Pepe," said Gondomar. "You ought to understand that the caballero means to personate you."

"Personate me!" exclaimed Pepe, in alarm. "That is quite another affair. Your lordship must excuse me. I don't like it. I shall have to bear the blame of any indiscretion the caballero may commit."

"Give yourself no uneasiness, Pepe," said Gondomar. "The caballero has the strongest motives for caution. Equip him in your newest suit. You shall have it back in an hour."

"In spite of these assurances, my mind misgives me," said Pepe. "But I am under too many obligations to your lordship to refuse. Come with me, señor."

And he took Charles into the inner room, from which, in a short space of time, the prince emerged, attired in garments of orange-coloured satin, like the menino. The habiliments might have been made for him, so well did they fit.

"Bravo! This will do admirably!" cried Gondomar, on beholding him.

"Yes, the caballero makes a very handsome page," said Pepe; "but let him keep clear of the other meninos and ushers, or he will assuredly be detected."

"Never fear," rejoined Gondomar. "Await our return."

So saying, he quitted the room with Charles.

From the corridor the count and the newly-made page proceeded through a variety of passages, up and down staircases, until they came to a superb suite of rooms,

the windows of which, Gondomar informed his companion, overlooked the valley of the Manzanares. All these were lighted up, but there was no company within them, only a few attendants standing near the open doors, who bowed respectfully as Gondomar passed on.

At length the count and his companion came to a grand saloon, at the door of which two gentlemen-ushers, bearing wands, were stationed. Only the central chandelier was lighted, so that the two extremities of the vast hall were, comparatively speaking, buried in gloom. A concert was going forward in this part of the saloon, and Charles learnt from his conductor that the chief performers at it were members of the royal family. Surrounded by *meninos* and *meninas*, intermingled with a few courtiers and ladies of rank, all standing, sat, near a table on which some musical instruments were placed, the young King of Spain, with his youthful and lovely queen, his two brothers, the Infantes Don Carlos and the Cardinal Don Fernando, both of whom were mere boys, and the peerless damsel, whom Charles had travelled so far to behold—the Infanta Maria. There she sat in the midst of the group, the object towards which all eyes were turned, for she had just taken up a mandoline, and was about to sing.

Gondomar and Charles, who had noiselessly advanced to a short distance within the saloon, stood still, and the prince, who was enraptured at the sight of the Infanta, held his breath to listen.

After a brief prelude she began. Her song was one of those romantic ballads which breathe of love and chivalry, and told how a Spanish maiden was carried off by a Moor, and after long captivity was delivered by her knightly lover. The utmost effect possible was given to the words, and Charles was alternately melted by tenderness, moved to pity, and roused to martial enthusiasm. The singer's voice was exquisite, and the prince felt a vivid thrill in his breast when the sweet notes ceased. Perhaps if she had known whose ears were drinking in those melodious sounds, she could not have produced them.

This ballad closed the concert, and when it was over the royal party fell into conversation. Counselling the prince to remain where he was, Gondomar stepped forward, and, after making a reverence to the king and queen, entered into conversation with the Infanta.

Charles was now able to study the features of his mistress, and as he looked at her his admiration increased. The Infanta Maria was just seventeen, and her charms were well calculated to inflame the prince. She possessed the same slight symmetrical figure as her sister, Anne of Austria, and if they had been together it would have been difficult to decide which of the two was the most beautiful. Maria had tender blue eyes, soft and deep as summer skies, beautifully pencilled eyebrows, a ravishingly fair complexion, full lips that blushed like coral, and teeth like pearls. Her face was oval in form, and her features charming, though not classically moulded. Her tresses were of a light golden hue. Their sole ornament on the present occasion was an oleander flower, placed at the side of the head. Her attire was of black velvet, embroidered with gold, which set off the dazzling fairness of her skin. Lovely as she was, it was evident that in another year she would be lovelier still. Her manner was graceful and captivating, and had none of the coldness and reserve that Charles expected. He forgot that he saw her when she was entirely unrestrained by etiquette.

When Charles could remove his gaze from the Infanta, he turned to the young King of Spain, whose features strongly resembled those of his sister. Philip had a very youthful appearance—indeed, he was under twenty—and this juvenile look was heightened by a slight graceful figure, blonde locks, large blue eyes, a complexion of almost feminine delicacy, and small hands and feet that even an Andalusian dame might have envied. His features were well formed, but his visage was somewhat long, and he had the protruding under lip which marked his line, and proclaimed him a descendant of Charles V. A fair silken moustache shaded his upper

lip, and with a slight pointed beard in some degree counteracted the effeminacy of his expression. In stature he was tall, and his person well proportioned, though slender. His manner was high bred and haughty. His vestments were of carnation satin embroidered with black silk and gold, and displayed his elegant figure to great advantage. Around his neck he wore the Toison d'Or, and the cross of Santiago was embroidered on his mantle. Naturally indolent and feeble in character, the young king was entirely governed by his favourite and minister, the Conde-Duque de Olivarez, but he possessed highly cultivated tastes, and was a great patron of art and letters.

Philip's two brothers, as we have said, were merely boys—the elder, Don Carlos, not being more than fifteen—but they were well-grown, well-favoured striplings, and promised to become fine-looking men. In aspect and manner, the Infante Don Carlos differed totally from his brothers. His expression was thoughtful, and his countenance was stamped with a gravity far beyond his years. His features were regular, his complexion dark, and his eyes large and black, and his hair, which he wore short, of the same hue. His gravity and dark complexion delighted the people, who remarked, when he showed himself among them, “At last we have got a prince of our own colour.” Don Carlos had no particular title or post, but, as heir to the throne, ranked as second person in the kingdom. He had a large revenue, and was allowed precisely the same wardrobe as the king. His costume on the present occasion was of carnation satin, embroidered like that of his royal brother.

The Infante Don Fernando was fair, with blonde locks, tender blue eyes, and a skin soft and smooth as that of a girl. Indeed, with his slim figure and regular features, he looked like a damsel habited as a page. His habiliments were of black velvet. Young as he was, the Infante Don Fernando was a prince of the Church, having already acquired the dignity of cardinal. He was also Archbishop of Toledo, accounted the highest spiritual dignity in Christendom after the Papacy, inasmuch as

the Chancellorship of Castile was annexed to it, and he possessed the large annual revenue of three hundred thousand crowns. At the moment when Charles's eye fell upon him, the boy-cardinal, archbishop, and chancellor, who had infinitely more the air of a page than of a grave ecclesiastical dignitary, was conversing with the Papal Nuncio, who formed one of the party, and occupied a seat between him and the king.

One person alone remains to be described—perhaps the most attractive of the party. This was the young queen, Elizabeth of France. She was only just nineteen, and consequently still in the spring of her beauty. But she was very lovely, and had a noble figure. Her transparently white skin set off to perfection her splendid black eyes, arched brows, and rich black tresses. The young queen had great vivacity of manner, laughed frequently so as to display her pearly teeth, and her looks and gestures were so eloquent and expressive that Charles almost fancied he could understand what she said.

Not much time, however, was allowed him for further observation, for it soon became evident that the party were about to break up. The Nuncio was the first to rise. Respectfully saluting their majesties, he retired, being conducted to the side-door by the mayor-domo mayor, the Conde de Puebla. Shortly afterwards the king and queen prepared to depart, and while taking leave of the Infanta, her majesty embraced her tenderly. The royal pair, followed by the two young princes, and a crowd of courtiers and attendants, and preceded by the Conde de Puebla, passed out at the side-door.

The only person now left of the royal party was the Infanta, and she lingered because Gondomar had made her understand that he had some intelligence to communicate to her.

"What have you to say to me, count?" she whispered, as the attention of the meninos and damsels of honour was diverted by the departure of their majesties.

"Prepare yourself for a great surprise, princesa," replied Gondomar, in the same tone. "He is here."

"He!—who?" exclaimed the Infanta, fixing her large eyes inquiringly upon him.

"Who else could it be but your lover, Don Carlos Estuardo?" replied Gondomar.

"You amaze me!" she cried, blushing deeply. "I did not know the prince was in Madrid."

"He has only just arrived, and no one will be made aware of the circumstance till to-morrow," replied Gondomar. "But he could not control his impatience to behold you, so I consented to bring him here, and make you acquainted with his presence."

"Where—where is he?" demanded the Infanta, in a voice tremulous with emotion, and scarcely daring to look round.

"Yonder—on the right—disguised as a page."

"Heavens! if he should be discovered!" cried the Infanta, with increasing emotion.

"Calm yourself, princesa, or you will attract attention. He is dying to say a word to you."

"It must not be," she replied. "He is imprudent to venture here at all. You should not have brought him, count."

"I could not resist his passionate prayers," said Gondomar. "Neither would you blame me, if you had heard him. Have you not a word for him, princesa?"

"I know not what to say. Tell him—say I bid him welcome."

"Is that all? It is but little, methinks, for a lover who has come so far to behold his mistress."

"No more, my lord. We shall be observed."

On this, Gondomar bowed and fell back, but he kept his eye fixed upon the Infanta.

For a moment she looked irresolute. She then called to her dueña, Doña Elvira de Medanilla, a stately, middle-aged dame with a severe aspect, who had luckily been engaged with Padre Ambrosio, the Infanta's confessor, during the foregoing discourse, and signified her intention of retiring. This was the signal for the *meninos* and *meninas* to withdraw, and they accordingly made

their reverences to the Infanta, and departed—the pages trooping off in one direction, and the maids of honour in another.

As soon as they were gone, the Infanta made a gracious movement to Gondomar, and moved slowly down the grand saloon, attended by Doña Elvira. They passed close by Charles, who bowed reverentially as they drew near.

Then for the first time the eyes of the lovers met, and it was only by a great effort that Charles repressed the impulse that prompted him to spring forward and throw himself at the Infanta's feet. He was still watching her departing figure, as she glided down the saloon, when he was joined by Gondomar.

"What think you of your mistress, prince?" inquired the count.

"She is an adorable creature," replied Charles. "Oh! that I could have said one word to her! To be so near and yet be debarred from speech—'tis enough to drive one mad! But look!" he added, with an irrepressible exclamation of delight. "She returns—and alone."

"Nothing like a woman's wit," said Gondomar. "She has contrived to give her dueña the slip, and will afford your highness the opportunity you so eagerly desire of exchanging a word with her."

As they spoke, the Infanta, who had left Doña Elvira at the lower end of the salon, came on quickly. Gondomar, followed by Charles, advanced to meet her.

"I have forgotten my fan, count," said the Infanta, as she approached. "I must have left it on the table with the music."

"I will bring it to you in an instant, princesa," cried Gondomar, flying towards the table.

The eagerly-desired moment had come. Charles was alone with the Infanta. But his agitation was so great that he could scarcely profit by the opportunity.

"Forgive me for thus presenting myself before you, princess," he cried, at length. "Love has brought me to Madrid—love for you, princess. Love, therefore, must

plead my excuse. Your image cheered me on during my long and toilsome journey, and when I arrived here this evening, I was determined, at all hazards, to behold you. I have, therefore, presented myself to you in this guise. Forgive me, princess! forgive me!"

"You plead so earnestly, prince, that I must forgive you," she replied. "I ought not to have granted this interview—so contrary to etiquette and propriety. But I could not allow you to go away without telling you how sensible I am of your gallantry and devotion."

"Oh, princess!" exclaimed Charles, passionately. "I dare not throw myself at your feet and tell you how much I adore you. But I implore you to satisfy me that my love is not unrequited."

"I think I can love you, prince," she rejoined. "But I must consult others before I dare answer the question explicitly."

"What others?" cried Charles. "In such a case you have only to consult your own heart."

"But I have been taught that in trusting to such guidance I may be misled," replied the Infanta. "My feelings may deceive me."

"Say not so, princess!" cried Charles. "The heart never deceives. It will not be tutored. Speak, then, according to its dictates, and answer me frankly—can you love me?"

"I am forbidden—strictly forbidden—to answer such a question, prince, without the king my brother's consent," she replied.

"Who has forbidden you?" demanded Charles.

"My confessor, Padre Ambrosio—my dueña, Doña Elvira—all who have charge of me," returned the Infanta.

"Have they ever spoken to you of me?" asked Charles.

"Often. They are constantly talking about you. They describe you as a charming young prince, but——"

"But what?" cried Charles. "Do not hesitate to tell me."

"They say you have one great fault, which counterbalances all your merits. You are a heretic."

"Why, so I am in religion, but not in love, sweetest Maria," returned Charles, smiling. "But I mean to allow you the free exercise of your faith. Will not that suffice? It ought, methinks."

"It would be far better if you could conform to my faith," said the Infanta. "There would then be no obstacle to our union, and I should feel that it would be approved by Heaven. You would then be without a fault, and I could give you my entire affection."

"And can you not give it me as it is?" demanded Charles.

"I cannot promise," she rejoined. "I must first try to convert you."

"The effort will be vain, princess," said Charles. "My religious tenets are unchangeable. But I promise you—and indeed the king my father has solemnly engaged for me—that you shall have the full and free exercise of your own faith—you and your children. That is all I can do. Is it not enough?"

"I must consider," replied the Infanta. "I must consult Padre Ambrosio."

"I feel I have an enemy in your confessor, princess," said Charles. "But I did not anticipate a discussion like this on our first meeting."

"It is best we should understand each other, prince," she returned. "I am a devout Catholic."

"You are a bigot, but a very charming one, Maria," said Charles.

At this moment Gondomar returned.

"Your fan, princesa," he said, bowing, and delivering it to her.

"You have been long, count," she remarked, with a smile.

"Nay, madam, I feared to interrupt."

"Adios, prince," cried the Infanta to Charles. "Think of what I have said to you."

"One word more before we part, Maria?" he cried.

She made no response, but tripped off to her *dueña*.

"All has gone well, I trust, prince?" inquired Gondomar.

"The Infanta is charming, but somewhat bigoted," returned Charles. "She has told me plainly that she will convert me, and I have told her equally plainly that she will fail in the attempt."

"This is the work of her confessor, Padre Ambrosio, who has enjoined her to make your highness's adoption of the faith of Rome the price of her hand," said Gondomar. "But rest easy. The king will give her to you without any conditions. But now that our object has been attained, the sooner we depart the better."

They then quitted the saloon. In the ante-chamber through which they had to pass several courtiers were collected, and Gondomar was obliged to stop for a moment to speak to them. Charles moved on to a short distance, and waited for him.

As soon as Gondomar could disengage himself, he was hurrying towards the prince, when a tall, handsome young man, attired in murrey-coloured velvet, and possessing a very striking physiognomy, stopped him.

"A moment, count," said the young man. "Oblige me with the name of yonder page. It is the first time I have seen him in the palace. He has a very remarkable countenance, and a very stately figure. I should like to paint him."

"I will tell him so," replied Gondomar. "He will be proud to hear that he has attracted the attention of so great a painter as Don Diego Velasquez de Silva."

"But you do not tell me his name, count," said Velasquez.

"You shall know it to-morrow, Don Diego," returned Gondomar, hastily.

"Meantime, I will tell it you," rejoined Velasquez. "I noticed him in the grand salon just now, and I then suspected who he was, though, as he kept aloof, I could not be quite sure. But now I have no doubt whatever on the point. There cannot be two such heads. That page, my lord, is Prince Charles of England."

"Hush!" exclaimed Gondomar. "Let your lips be fast sealed, Don Diego."

"Fear not, my lord," said Velasquez. "The prince's secret is safe with me. I dare not make the request, but if his highness will deign to sit to me for his portrait, he will confer the greatest obligation upon me."

"I will not fail to mention the matter to him, Don Diego," replied Gondomar. "Meantime, I rely on your secrecy."

With this he bowed to Velasquez, and rejoining Charles, told him what had just occurred, mentioning, at the same time, the request of the great painter.

"It will gratify him deeply if your highness thinks fit to comply with it," he said.

"He shall paint my portrait for the Infanta, as a companion picture to the one painted by him of her highness, which is in my possession," rejoined Charles. "Tell him so."

"I will make him happy at once," replied Gondomar.

And he flew back to Velasquez, whose dark cheek flushed, and whose eyes brightened, as the message was communicated to him. Placing his hand upon his heart with a look of ineffable gratitude, he bowed to the prince, who graciously returned the salute.

All this passed with great rapidity, and fortunately did not attract attention.

In another minute Charles and Gondomar were traversing corridors and passages, making their way towards Pepe's lodging, which they reached without further interruption. Here the prince resumed his own attire with as much expedition as possible, and having warmly thanked the menino for the service he had rendered him, he proceeded with Gondomar to the great court, where they found the coach waiting for them.

Ere long they had reached the House of Seven Chimneys, and alighting in the plazuela, at once repaired to the garden gate. On unlocking it, they found the Earl of Bristol, who was keeping watch, wrapped in his cloak.

Gondomar then took his leave, promising to make his appearance at an early hour on the morrow, to receive the prince's commands,

"Heaven be praised your highness has got back in safety!" exclaimed Bristol. "Have you seen the infant?"

"Seen her and spoken with her," replied Charles.

"Amazement!" cried the earl. "This is indeed a romantic incident."

"You will say so, my lord, when you learn all particulars," replied the prince.

Having secured the gate, the earl conducted the prince to the house. All the inmates had retired to rest, but a collation was laid out in one of the lower rooms. Charles, however, declined to partake of it, and was at once taken to the spacious chamber prepared for him. A magnificent couch invited him to repose, and shortly afterwards, throwing himself upon it, he sunk into slumber.

III.

THE WHITE DOVE.

THE windows of the chamber in which Charles slept looked towards the garden, and as he arose, perfectly refreshed by a night of sound repose, he attired himself without waiting for his attendants, and threw open the casement. The morning was bright and beautiful, the sky cloudless and of the deepest blue, and a gentle breeze came laden with the scent of orange-blossoms and fragrant flowers.

Beyond the garden walls, on the left, arose the roof of the convent of San Francisco, with a church adjoining it, the bells of which were now jingling musically. On the right, through an opening amid the houses, could be seen in the distance the lofty range of the Guadarrama mountains, with their jagged peaks covered with snow. The garden itself, with its orange-groves, its tall cypresses, its two large mulberry-trees, each with a seat beneath

it, its parterres and pleasant walks, adorned with statues and marble urns filled with flowers, seemed to invite him to stroll forth.

A charming concert arose from the trees, and Charles was listening to the melodious strains poured forth by the little warblers, when a snow-white dove, which had been gently cooing in one of the mulberry-trees, flew towards the casement at which he stood, and, without manifesting the slightest alarm, alighted on the sill close beside him. Charles did not move, for fear of disturbing the bird, and there it remained pluming itself and regarding him with its lovely eyes, until the opening of the chamber door scared it away. Greatly to Charles's satisfaction, however, the dove almost instantly returned, and settled on the same spot. The person who had just entered the chamber was Sir Richard Graham, and the prince pointed out his pretty visitor to him.

"The appearance of this beautiful bird, the emblem of all that is pure and holy, at a juncture like the present, may be accepted as a fortunate omen," said Charles. "Do you not think so, Sir Richard?"

"Assuredly, your highness," replied Graham. "But to my mind the dove looks like a love-messenger, and may have a letter from the Infanta under its wing."

"Poh! that is an idle thought," replied Charles. "The poor bird brings me no letter, but it gives me hope."

"A propos of letters, I have one for your highness," remarked Graham.

"From the king my father?" cried Charles, eagerly.

"No," replied Graham. "You will be surprised when you learn from whom it comes. I pray your highness to observe the superscription—'Al muy noble, y muy ilustre Señor, Don Carlos Estuardo.'"

"Who can have written it?" cried Charles, in surprise.

"You can satisfy your curiosity by breaking the seal," said Graham. "But, before doing so, let me offer you an agreeable piece of information. The two barbs given you by the Duke de Cea have been sent back."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the prince.

"They were brought here by two muleteers before daylight this morning," said Graham, "and are now safe in the stables of the House of Seven Chimneys. Perhaps that letter may relate to them."

"Pithee, read it to me," said Charles.

Graham then opened the letter, and read aloud as follows:

"SERENISIMO SENOR!

"Though a robber, I am a man of honour.

"Your highness will, therefore, conceive how deep must have been my displeasure on finding that two of my band, Melchior and Geronimo, had dared to carry off the horses which your highness and the noble marquis accompanying you had condescended to take in exchange for your barbs.

"In order to meet the justice of the case, and as an example to their comrades, I immediately caused both rascals to be shot. I trust their punishment will be satisfactory to your highness.

"But, after an occurrence so opposed to my notions of honourable conduct, I cannot think of retaining the barbs, and I therefore send them back to your highness and the noble marquis, with a profound expression of regret for the annoyance you have experienced.

"Your highness will not be surprised that I am acquainted with your exalted rank, as well as with the rank of your noble companion, when I inform you that a courier from London, bearing despatches from your royal father, and two couriers from Paris, with despatches mentioning your visit to that capital, are now in my hands. These couriers shall remain for twelve hours in the Somosierra, as I have reason to believe their detention for that time will be agreeable to your highness. They shall then come on with the despatches.

"Your highness, I trust, will credit me when I state that, had I been aware at the time whom I had the

honour of escorting, you should never have known me as other than Capitan Mendez.

"Viva le Principe de Inglaterra!"

"EL CORTEJO."

"A strange epistle!" exclaimed Charles, laughing. "This fellow piques himself upon his nice sense of honour. He richly deserves it, no doubt, but I should be sorry to see him hanged."

"He deserves to be rewarded rather than hanged," rejoined Graham. "He has made all the amends in his power by shooting those two rascals and sending back the barbs. In fact, he has rendered your highness an important service. Had he not detained the couriers, your arrival in Madrid must have been known last night, and then you could not have taken the king and Olivarez by surprise."

"Nor have visited the palace last night," said Charles, smiling.

"Is it possible you did so?" cried Graham, in amazement. "I thought your highness had retired to rest early."

"I spent more than an hour at the palace, and saw the whole of the royal family in their privacy."

"Without making yourself known?"

"Without making myself known—save to the Infanta."

"By Heaven! you have done wonders!" exclaimed Graham. "The Duke de Cea spoke of the strictness of Spanish court etiquette, and declared it would be impossible for your highness to obtain a private interview with the Infanta."

"De Cea was wrong, Dick. The impossibility has already been accomplished," replied Charles, laughing.

"In truth, your highness is a veritable preux chevalier, and has come to conquer," said Graham. "The affair is already settled."

"Not quite," rejoined Charles, gravely. "I should

have felt rather despondent this morning, had not that dove cheered me."

Just at this moment the door was opened by Buckingham, who unceremoniously entered, accompanied by Gondomar. The marquis was arrayed in the splendid habiliments which he had procured from Marolles in Paris.

"I have to congratulate your highness on your success last night," he said. "You have begun the game admirably, and have won the first stake. Gondomar tells me you have not only seen the Infanta, but conversed with her."

"I owe my success entirely to the count's management," said Charles. "But on calm reflection I feel it was a very rash proceeding, and ought not to have been undertaken."

"Repentance comes too late," said Buckingham. "But I see nothing to regret."

"Having just come from the palace," said Gondomar, "I am able to give your highness positive assurance that your secret visit is wholly unsuspected. In fact, no rumour whatever of your arrival at Madrid has as yet got abroad. I have come here to learn your pleasure, but as certain formalities must be observed, I will venture to suggest that my lord of Buckingham shall accompany me to acquaint his majesty with your arrival."

"Precisely the course I meant to enjoin," said Charles. "Go at once. I will not stir forth till you return. Yet stay!" he added, arresting their departure. "It may be proper to consult my lord of Bristol before you take this step."

"I cannot consult Bristol on any point," said Buckingham, haughtily. "If your highness thinks fit, let him go with Gondomar. But in that case they must go without me."

"Nay, in Heaven's name, go!" said Charles, who was well aware of the jealous nature of his favourite.

Buckingham and Gondomar then bowed and withdrew, and as the door closed upon them, Charles muttered

to himself, "Henceforward I shall be a mere puppet in the hands of others—to be played with as they think proper."

Shortly afterwards, the prince took a solitary stroll in the garden to enjoy the beauty of the morning, and think over his interview with the Infanta. With mixed emotions, he recalled each word she had uttered, and, in spite of all his efforts to shake it off, a fear came over him that his hopes would be blighted. To lose the Infanta would be worse than death. Yet it was possible, from what she had said, that religious differences might separate them.

While indulging in these meditations, he had seated himself beneath one of the mulberry-trees. A slight noise attracted his attention, and looking up, he perceived that the milk-white dove had settled over his head.

"That gentle bird gives me new hope," he ejaculated. "I will cast off all doubt and despondency. The Infanta will be mine."

End of the Second Book.

BOOK III.—THE CONDE-DUQUE DE OLIVAREZ.

I.

HOW BUCKINGHAM WAS PRESENTED TO OLIVAREZ.

BUCKINGHAM and Gondomar, entering the coach of the latter, drove to the palace of the Conde-Duque de Olivarez, a noble edifice, charmingly situated at the northern extremity of the Calle de Alcala, on the brow of the eminence overlooking the woody valley of the Prado.

The internal arrangements of the mansion corresponded with its superb exterior. Excepting the royal palace, no

other princely residence in Madrid possessed such a splendid suite of apartments as the palace of the Conde-Duque. On the side of the Prado was a broad terrace forming a delightful promenade, and communicating with the vast garden at the rear of the noble pile. The grand façade of the palace looked towards the Calle de Alcalá, from which it was separated by a broad and well-paved court, defended by a gilt railing. In the centre of the railing was a lofty iron gateway, very elaborately and beautifully wrought, and embellished with the armorial bearings of the ancient and illustrious house of Guzman.

As Buckingham drove through this gateway and contemplated the imposing façade, he could not help acknowledging that it was an abode worthy of a great minister—but the splendour of the palace increased his desire to lower the pride of its owner. Buckingham hated Olivarez because he possessed the same sort of influence over Philip IV. that he himself had over James I. He looked upon the Spanish minister as a rival and an enemy, whose humiliation would heighten his own glory.

At the period of which we write, the three most important kingdoms in Europe were governed by favourites, supreme and almost irresponsible power being confided to them by their respective sovereigns. Thus the destinies of France were committed to Richelieu—those of Spain to Olivarez—those of England to Buckingham. By far the ablest and most sagacious of the three was Richelieu, and not without reason he despised his rivals. Still they were formidable from the power they possessed, and, united, might have crushed him. But the mutual distrust entertained of each other by Buckingham and Olivarez prevented any such alliance. There was no league possible between two ministers, each of whom believed that the other was playing false. With this insight into Buckingham's breast, it will easily be understood with what feelings he regarded his approaching meeting with his rival.

But before describing that meeting, let us say a word as to the powerful Spanish minister,

Don Gaspar Guzman, Conde-Duque de Olivarez, had risen to his present eminent position, when Philip IV., at that time too young to undertake the charge of government, ascended the throne. Before that period, by attaching himself zealously to the youthful prince, Olivarez had succeeded in obtaining unbounded influence over him. Consequently, on Philip's accession to power his own elevation was certain. His ascendancy over the feeble monarch was absolute, and Philip, without an effort, resigned himself to the sway of his favourite.

Olivarez had many qualities that well fitted him for the important post he occupied—great capacity for business, unwearied application, shrewdness, and caution. But he was arrogant, vindictive, and unrelenting, and his harshness made him numerous enemies. Perfidious himself, he was distrustful of others. His leading idea was to give a preponderating influence in Europe to the House of Austria, and he thought that the marriage of the Infanta with the heir to the throne of England would further his designs, but suspicious of James and Buckingham, he was resolved not to permit the completion of the match till he had secured solid advantages for Spain, and with this view he protracted the negotiation on one pretext or another, constantly making a fresh demand when any point had been conceded. Disgusted by his perpetual subterfuges, Bristol was more than once on the point of breaking off the treaty; but this was not what Olivarez desired, and by promises and professions, never meant to be fulfilled, he succeeded in cajoling the English ambassador.

Olivarez was now in the very prime of life, being between thirty and forty. He possessed a countenance of great shrewdness and intelligence, lighted up by large penetrating black eyes, which seemed to emit flashes of fire when he was animated or angry. His complexion was exceedingly dark; his features regular and handsome. He was of middle height, and well formed. In manner he was a thorough Castilian, cold, reserved, and exceedingly haughty, but his arrogance could be laid aside if needful,

Such was Don Gaspar de Guzman, Conde-Duque de Olivarez, chief Cupbearer to the king, Grand Master of the Horse, chief of the Council of State, and prime minister.

The aim of Olivarez was to surpass the Duke of Lerma in splendour, so he kept up a princely retinue, and gave magnificent entertainments. Like his royal master, he was a great patron of the arts, and had a splendid gallery of pictures, to which he was constantly making large additions.

The Countess de Olivarez, who was some ten years younger than her lord, and sprung from an illustrious Andalusian family, possessed all the beauty and witchery of a daughter of that sunny region, and was esteemed one of the loveliest and sprightliest dames of the court. The gallants averred that the Conde-Duke was foolish enough to be jealous of his charming spouse, but they did not venture to add that she gave him cause for jealousy.

Though Olivarez had spies at the court of Whitehall, who gave him early information of every matter of moment, yet, owing to the precautions taken by James in closing the ports, no intelligence of the prince's journey had reached him, and being totally ignorant of the arrival of the travellers in Madrid, he was quite unprepared for Buckingham's visit.

He was standing at the time with the countess on a broad marble balcony overlooking the valley of the Prado, his gaze wandering over the woody valley from the ancient Monasterio de Atocha to the Puerta de Recoletos, midway between which his palace was situated, when an usher announced the Conde de Gondomar.

"His lordship is not alone," continued the usher. "There is a caballero with him, whom he did not name, but who looks like a person of distinction."

"Did the count request a private audience, Juan?" asked Olivarez.

"No, my lord," returned the usher. "I think he

merely desires to present to your excellency the caballero I have mentioned, who appears to be a stranger."

"I will come to them instantly," said the Conde-Duque.

The usher bowed and retired.

"Come with me, madam," said Olivarez to the countess. "Gondomar may desire to present this stranger to you."

They then passed through the open casement into a large and splendidly-furnished apartment, at the farther end of which stood Gondomar and Buckingham.

The tall and stately figure of Buckingham at once caught the eye of Olivarez, and though he was far from suspecting the truth, he felt certain that the stranger was no ordinary individual.

"What a noble-looking person!" exclaimed the duchess, who was equally struck by Buckingham's appearance. "Who can he be?"

"We shall learn that soon enough," rejoined the Conde-Duque, somewhat sharply. "Something warns me he is an enemy."

"Poh! your excellency is always suspicious," said the duchess.

On his part, Buckingham regarded his rival with equal curiosity.

The Conde-Duque, we may mention, was attired in a doublet and cloak of tawny taffeta, thickly laced with silver. His hat, which he had put on, was fastened at the side by a superb diamond brooch, and adorned with tawny plumes.

The countess, who moved with the incomparable grace of an Andalusian dame, and who had the smallest feet imaginable, and the largest eyes, was dressed in black satin, deeply fringed with black lace; and though the attire was simple, none could have better suited her exquisite figure. Her ebon tresses were draped in a magnificent black lace mantilla, and harmonised well with her rich Southern complexion and splendid black eyes,

soft as velvet, and shaded by long silken lashes. In her hand she carried a fan.

"Is that the duchess?" inquired Buckingham, who was greatly struck by her beauty.

Gondomar replied in the affirmative, adding, "She is a charming creature; but do not fall in love with her. Olivarez is as jealous as a Moor."

"I make no promises," replied Buckingham, smiling. "Those eyes are enough to tempt Saint Anthony himself."

Gondomar then moved on, followed by Buckingham, and approaching Olivarez, said, "Permit me to present to your excellency the Lord Marquis of Buckingham, who is newly arrived in Madrid."

Master as he usually was of himself, Olivarez absolutely started with surprise at the announcement.

"What! my lord of Buckingham here!" he exclaimed.

"So this is the Marquis of Buckingham! I felt sure it must be some very important personage!" mentally ejaculated the countess.

"Ay, your excellency," replied Buckingham, bowing. "I have been sent by my royal master, the King of England, to see whether we cannot bring this long protracted marriage-treaty to a happy issue."

"You may account it concluded, since such is your errand, my dear lord," said Olivarez. "This indeed is a joyful surprise. I am delighted to see your lordship, and so, I am sure, will be his majesty."

"Your excellency is most obliging," replied Buckingham, bowing. "But let me entreat you to present me to the countess."

Olivarez instantly complied, and profound salutations were exchanged between them. After a few compliments had passed, Buckingham said, "I think there is a better chance that the match may be speedily concluded, as the Prince of Wales has come in person to claim his bride."

At this unexpected announcement the minister's dark cheek flushed, but he quickly recovered himself, and gave vent to the most extravagant protestations of delight.

"His majesty must be made instantly acquainted with the welcome news of the prince's arrival," he said. "It will gladden him as much as it does me. Your lordship, I trust, will accompany me to the palace, when I will present you to my royal master, and you can make the gladsome tidings known to him with your own lips. Everything shall be done to manifest our sense of the signal honour conferred upon us. After you have seen the king, I will go with you to pay my reverence to the prince."

"The prince must be a model of gallantry to undertake this journey for his mistress," said the countess. "I long to announce his arrival to the Infanta."

"Then come with us to the palace," said the Conde-Duque. "You shall be the first to give her the joyous intelligence."

"Not quite the first," said Gondomar, aside, to Buckingham.

Shortly afterwards a splendid carriage, drawn by four horses, and attended by a mounted escort, was dashing along the Calle de Alcala, in the direction of the royal palace. The large windows of this roomy carriage showed that there were four persons inside it, three of whom were immediately recognised by those who gazed at the gorgeous equipage, but the fourth was a stranger.

II.

PHILIP IV.

ON that morning, Philip had given a private audience to the Nuncio, and the Papal envoy was still with the king, when Olivarez, unannounced, entered the royal cabinet. It being quite evident, from the minister's looks, that he had matter of importance to communicate to his majesty, the Nuncio immediately arose and prepared to retire.

"A moment, monseñor," said Olivarez, stopping him; "let me ask whether you have heard further from his Holiness? Will he send the dispensation for the marriage of the Infanta with the Prince of Wales?"

"Not till he receives positive assurance that better terms will be made with England," replied the Nuncio. "The matter rests entirely with your excellency. His Holiness knows your desire to promote the interests of the Church of Rome, and when you deem it expedient, the dispensation will be sent—but not till then."

"Enough, monseñor," replied Olivarez, bowing. "In all probability it will be soon required."

"I rejoice to hear it, my lord," said the Nuncio, "for I infer that you expect to gain your point." And bowing to the minister, he quitted the cabinet.

"I am not so sanguine as your excellency appears to be," remarked Philip, as soon as they were alone. "I do not think we shall extort any further concessions from the King of England."

"It is in your majesty's power to impose upon him any conditions you think proper," said Olivarez.

"How?" exclaimed Philip. "What has changed the aspect of affairs?"

"An act of folly—inconceivable folly—on the part of

the British Solomon," returned Olivarez. "What will your majesty say if I tell you that this crafty and suspicious monarch has exhibited a blind confidence scarcely to be looked for in a rash and inexperienced youth?"

"What has he done? Explain yourself, my lord!" cried Philip.

"He has parted with his son—with the heir to the throne—and consigned him to your majesty's care."

"I cannot think you are trifling with me, my lord," said Philip. "Yet what you say sounds like a jest."

"It is scarcely credible, I own, sire; but, nevertheless, it is true that the Prince of Wales is now in Madrid. He arrived here last night, having ridden the whole distance by post, like a courier, attended only by the Marquis of Buckingham and three other gentlemen, and is now lodged with the Earl of Bristol."

"Amazement!" exclaimed the king. "And you had no intelligence of this journey, my lord?—you, who are usually so well informed."

"The journey appears to have been so suddenly resolved upon, and such precautions were taken to keep it secret, that information could not possibly be sent me," replied Olivarez. "For three days the ports were kept rigorously closed by James, so that no couriers could overtake the prince, and he and the marquis travelled under feigned names, and speeded on without halt, save for a day at Paris."

"By Santiago! a gallant exploit!" cried Philip. "Charles Stuart seems to have the spirit of a knight errant."

"Whatever spirit he may possess, he has committed a great imprudence," said Olivarez. "It is now for your majesty to consider what course you will pursue in regard to him."

"No consideration is required, my lord. There is but one course to pursue—receive him with open arms," cried Philip. "He has trusted to my loyalty, and shall find he has not misjudged me."

"I do not desire to check your majesty's noble im-

pulses," rejoined Olivarez, "but you must not throw away the extraordinary advantage you have gained. Receive the prince, as you propose, with all cordiality and honour. But his marriage with the Infanta must not take place till his conversion has been effected."

"That, indeed, would be a masterstroke," said Philip, after a moment's reflection. "But do you really think it can be achieved?"

"Nothing so easy, sire, now we have him here. He has been foolish in coming to us, but we should be doubly foolish if we let him go back without gaining our point."

"Such conduct appears to me disloyal and unworthy," said Philip.

"It is perfectly justifiable," rejoined Olivarez. "The prince has not been lured hither by any false promises from your majesty or from me, but has come of his own free will, and must take the consequences of his rashness. I should be unworthy of the post I hold if I did not prescribe a course from which, I trust, your majesty will not swerve. As I have said, let the prince be received with all honour. But he must be virtually a prisoner."

A cloud came over Philip's brow.

"A prisoner! Charles Stuart a prisoner!" he exclaimed. "I disapprove of the plan, my lord."

"Your majesty misapprehends me," said Olivarez. "I do not mean that the prince shall be subjected to any personal restraint. His prison shall be a chamber in this palace, his gaolers shall be your majesty and myself, nor shall he be aware that he is a captive unless he attempts to depart. He must be detained, on one pretext or another, till such time as we have accomplished our purpose. You must give him all sorts of grand entertainments—fêtes, masques, banquets, tournaments, and bull-fights. But, above all, your majesty must assign him and the marquis apartments in the palace, so that, without appearing to restrain them, you may have them in safe keeping. Our plans can then be put into operation for effecting the prince's conversion, and to this most desirable

end the Infanta herself will be an important instrument. And now, having hastily explained my views, I must inform your majesty that the lord marquis is in the antechamber, anxiously waiting to be presented to you."

Philip desiring that Buckingham should be at once admitted, Olivarez left the cabinet, returning the next moment with the marquis and Gondomar.

Buckingham threw himself on his knees before the king, but Philip instantly raised him.

"My first duty is to deliver this letter to your majesty," said the marquis, producing a despatch. "It is from the king my master. In it he recommends the prince his son to your majesty, and explains the motive of his highness's journey."

So saying, with a profound reverence he presented the letter to the king.

"I thank you, my good lord," said Philip. "I will read the letter anon. Had I known of his highness's coming, he should have had a reception worthy of him, and should have been escorted from the frontiers of the kingdom to this city. I myself would have met him at Burgos, attended by all the grandees of my court. Believe me, I am sensibly touched by the gallantry and courage he has displayed. I long to behold him and embrace him, and thank him for the honour he has done me and my sister, the Infanta Maria."

"His highness is equally anxious to behold your majesty," returned Buckingham, "and only awaits your gracious permission to present himself."

"No, no, that must not be," said Philip. "His highness has no suitable equipage—no retinue. He is lodged at the Earl of Bristol's casa, as I understand. I will visit him there."

"Pardon me, sire, if I venture, in his highness's name, to decline the proffered honour," rejoined Buckingham. "The prince would never permit so great a condescension on your part. He feels that he ought first to wait on your majesty."

"But I must insist," cried Philip.

"Nay, sire, if you are resolved, the prince must of course give way," replied Buckingham.

"I will arrange the matter, so that there shall be no violation of etiquette," interposed Olivarez. "Your majesty and the prince shall meet on equal terms. With your permission, sire, I will attend my lord of Buckingham to pay my respects to his highness."

"Go, my lord," replied Philip; "and tell his highness that I am enchanted to hear of his arrival in Madrid, and, but for certain forms, would fly to welcome and embrace him. Say all this for me, my lord, and add that I place my palace at his disposal, and that there is nothing he can ask that I will not grant—nothing I will leave undone to gratify and content him. You have heard what I say, my good lord," he added to Buckingham, "and will not fail, I trust, to repeat my words to the prince your master."

Buckingham bowed profoundly.

"Conde de Gondomar," pursued Philip, "it may be agreeable to the Prince of Wales to have your attendance. It is my pleasure, therefore, that you attach yourself to the person of his highness during his stay in Madrid. Assist him with your counsel in all things, as if you were an Englishman."

"It will delight me to obey your majesty," said Gondomar, bowing.

"And now, my lords," said Philip, "I pray you hasten to the prince, and bid him welcome in my name. Be not niggard in your speech. Aught you may say will fall short of what I desire to convey."

"The prince shall have an exact report of all your gracious expressions, sire," returned Buckingham.

And bowing profoundly, he quitted the cabinet with Olivarez and Gondomar.

III.

PADRE AMBROSIO.

AT the same hour, in another apartment of the palace, sat the Infanta, with Doña Elvira de Medanilla and her meninas. The princess was engaged in embroidering a cushion, but did not proceed very sedulously with her task, and her silence and preoccupied manner attracted the notice of her attendants.

It was a relief when the Countess de Olivarez entered the chamber. The countess was a great favourite with the Infanta, and on seeing her, Maria immediately laid down her embroidery and flew to embrace her.

"What happy chance brings you to the palace so early this morning, countess?" inquired the Infanta.

"I accompanied the Conde-Duque, who has some affairs to transact with his majesty," replied the countess. "But I want to have a word with you in private, princess."

On hearing this, Doña Elvira and the meninas prepared to withdraw.

"I hope your ladyship will be able to extract some conversation from the princess," said Doña Elvira. "She has scarcely opened her lips this morning."

"What has made you so dull, princess?" inquired the countess, as the dueña quitted the room.

"I know not," replied the Infanta, blushing. "I have a slight headache. I did not sleep well last night."

"You did not dream of the prince, your suitor, I suppose?" said the countess.

"How strange you should ask me the question," returned Maria. "Yes, I *did* dream of him. I thought he had come to Madrid on purpose to see me."

"Can she have heard?" mentally exclaimed the countess, surprised. "But no! no! that is impossible. Was that all your dream, princess?" she added, playfully.

"No," replied Maria, "there was a great deal more. I thought the prince obtained admittance to the palace in the disguise of a page."

"Oh! indeed!" exclaimed the countess. "He was disguised as a page, eh? Pray go on, princess. I am deeply interested by your recital. Did the disguised prince speak to you?"

"Of course. I could not let him go without a word, since he had come so far to see me."

"I hope you have not mentioned your dream to any one else, princess?" remarked the countess. "You must not attempt to deceive me. You have seen your lover. You have spoken with him. I came to inform you of his arrival in Madrid, but I find he has been beforehand with me. Well, I am not surprised at it. Such gallantry was to be expected from a lover so enterprising. But I trust to Heaven the adventure may not be discovered."

"No fear of that," cried the Infanta. "But have you seen the prince, countess?"

"No, but I have seen his favourite, the Marquis of Buckingham, who has accompanied him on the journey, and who is a splendid-looking personage. Is the prince as handsome as you expected?"

"Much handsomer. He has noble features—the finest eyes I ever beheld—and a charming expression of countenance."

"Then you feel that you really *can* love him, eh?"

"I fear that I love him already, and that is what troubles me," returned the Infanta.

"The conviction need give you no uneasiness," remarked the countess, smiling. "The prince has a right to your heart."

"He will have, when we are affianced," replied Maria. "But that ceremonial cannot take place until after his conversion. I told him so last night."

"You were too hasty. Suppose the prince should refuse to change his creed?"

"Then he must go back without me."

"Ah! you will think differently when you have seen more of him," said the countess. "If he is really as charming as you describe him, you will never be able to refuse him, even though he should continue obstinate in his heresy. Were I in your place, I should not allow a question of faith to interfere with my happiness."

"Listen to me, countess," said the Infanta, "and I will open my heart to you. A struggle has long been going on in my breast between my sense of duty and my affections. So much has been said to me of Prince Charles, and the possibility of my marriage with him has been so much discussed, that I could not fail to dwell upon his image, and though I had never seen him, I began to love him. My heart was wholly unoccupied, and his image fixed itself there. I could think of no one else. I gazed upon his picture till I fancied it endowed with life. He haunted my dreams at night. Questioned by my confessor, I explained the state of my feelings to him, and was reproved sharply for my indulgence in such idle fancies, and enjoined to turn away my thoughts from the prince. 'You must never wed him, princess,' said Padre Ambrosio, 'unless he will consent to abjure his heresies and enter into the bosom of our Church. If you do, you will endanger your soul.'"

"But if Pope Gregory XV. sends the dispensation, you may wed the prince without any apprehension," rejoined the countess. "Besides, many marriages are made between Romanists and Protestants without the consent of his Holiness."

"So I remarked to Padre Ambrosio," observed the Infanta, "but he contends that no princess can so wed without a dispensation; and he affirms that the Pope is averse to the match, and will never consent to it unless the prince is converted."

"How comes Padre Ambrosio to be so well informed as to his Holiness's intentions?" asked the countess.

"The Nuncio has shown him a letter from the Pope," replied the Infanta. "Thus, you see, countess, that I am bound to check all my impulses of affection towards the

prince. This was an easy task formerly—but now that I have seen him—now that I have encountered his ardent gaze—now that I have listened to his protestations of love—my feelings are no longer under my control. I love Charles Stuart, countess—I love him. I dare not confess so much to Padre Ambrosio; but to you, who can sympathise with me, I will avow the truth.”

“I do sincerely sympathise with you, sweet princess,” said the countess, “but I see no reason for anxiety. Had not the prince come to claim you, I believe the match would never have taken place, but now that he is here all difficulties will vanish.”

“You really think so, countess?” cried the Infanta, joyfully.

“I do, indeed,” she replied, with an earnestness that left no doubt of her sincerity.

“Will you let me talk to you about the prince sometimes?” said the Infanta. “I have no friend—no confidante. I dare not speak to the king my brother—I cannot speak to the queen.”

“You shall have a friend and adviser in me, princess, and if you will follow my counsels all will go well, in spite of Padre Ambrosio.”

At this moment a side door opened, and the person alluded to entered the room. Padre Ambrosio was tall, dark, spare in figure, and had a searching look and a stern expression of countenance.

“I see my news has been anticipated, princess,” he said, glancing at the countess. “I came to tell you that the Prince of Wales has most unexpectedly arrived in Madrid.”

“Yes, father, the princess has already received the joyful intelligence from me,” rejoined the countess.

“What interpretation does your ladyship put upon his journey?” demanded Padre Ambrosio.

“What other interpretation can I put, except that he has come to fetch his bride?” she answered.

“That is one motive, doubtless, but not the principal motive. He would not have come hither in this manner unless he designed to become a convert.”

"Oh no, you are mistaken, father," cried the Infanta. "The prince has no such design."

"How know you that, princess? You have not seen him—ha?" cried Padre Ambrosio, quickly.

"What a question to ask, father?" interposed the countess. "How can she have seen him?"

"She appears confused," muttered Padre Ambrosio, as he watched the Infanta. "There is some concealment here."

At this moment Doña Elvira entered the room.

"All the palace is in excitement," she cried. "They say the Prince of Wales has arrived."

"It is perfectly true," replied the countess. "He arrived last night, but no announcement of the event was made till this morning."

"A singular circumstance occurred last night, which I cannot help connecting with the prince's arrival," said Doña Elvira. "There was a page in the palace who was unknown to all the other meninos, and no one can tell how he obtained admittance. We passed him as we left the great salon after the concert. Now I recollect, your highness spoke to him."

"Did I?" said the Infanta, quite unable to hide her confusion from the keen eye of the confessor.

"Did your highness remark that he was a stranger?" asked Padre Ambrosio.

"I took but little notice of him," she replied. "The Conde de Gondomar was with him."

"It was the prince in disguise—I am sure of it," muttered Padre Ambrosio. "Would your highness know that page again if you beheld him?" he asked.

"I should," interposed Doña Elvira.

Just then the door was thrown open, and the king entered the room.

"You have heard the news, Maria?" he cried, embracing his sister, as she flew towards him.

"I have, sire," she replied.

"I make no doubt you are impatient to behold your lover," he said. "You shall soon be gratified with a sight

of him. I will engage him to drive in the Prado this evening. You shall drive there too, with the queen and myself, and then you can obtain a view of him as we pass his coach."

"I thank your majesty for your gracious consideration," replied the Infanta.

"I, myself, am most anxious to behold him," pursued Philip, "and would gladly have visited him at the casa of the Earl of Bristol, where he is lodged, but he stands punctiliously upon etiquette. With the romantic character he has displayed in this expedition, I almost wonder he did not present himself at the palace this morning, and solicit an interview with you, Maria."

"Your Majesty is pleased to jest," replied the Infanta, blushing. "The prince must be too well aware of the rigorous etiquette practised at our court to transgress it."

"Humph!" muttered Padre Ambrosio.

"I long to behold the prince," remarked the Countess de Olivarez. "If he at all resembles his favourite, the Marquis of Buckingham, he must be very handsome."

"Yes, he is very handsome," echoed the Infanta, abstractedly.

"You speak as if you had seen him," remarked the king.

"I have his portrait, as you know, sire," she rejoined.

"Well, we shall all be able to judge of his appearance anon," said Philip. "He is reported to be the most chivalrous and accomplished prince in Europe, and I dare say he will not belie the description given of him. During the drive you must tie a white riband round your arm, Maria, so that the prince may know you."

"That precaution is scarcely necessary, methinks, sire," observed Padre Ambrosio, with a certain significance. "The prince cannot fail to recognise her highness."

"Possibly not," rejoined the king, smiling. "But it is best to make sure. And now adieu, sweet sister. Prepare yourself for a sight of your future consort. I shall give orders that all the nobles of the court repair to the Prado this evening. You will be there, countess, I now

go to acquaint her majesty with the unlooked-for occurrence."

With this, he again affectionately embraced his sister, and bowing to the countess, quitted the room.

"Stay with me awhile," whispered the Infanta to the countess. "I have more to say to you, and do not desire to be left alone with Doña Elvira and Padre Ambrosio."

"I will stay as long as you please," replied the countess.

IV.

OF THE VISIT PAID BY OLIVAREZ TO CHARLES.

ACCOMPANIED by Buckingham and Gondomar, and escorted by a mounted guard, as before, Olivarez drove to the House of Seven Chimneys, for the purpose of paying his homage to the prince.

On his arrival, the minister was ushered into the prince's presence with much ceremony by Buckingham. Charles was seated in a large tapestried hall, which served as a reception-chamber, and was surrounded at the moment by the Earl of Bristol, Sir Walter Aston, the ordinary ambassador to Madrid, and a man of considerable ability, young Harry Jermyn, Bristol's chief secretary, and Sir Richard Graham, Cottington, and Endymion Porter.

The prince had now abandoned his travelling attire, and wore the splendid court suit of white satin which he had procured in Paris. His head was covered with a broad-leaved Spanish hat, adorned with a diamond brooch and a white drooping plume. All his attendants were richly attired.

As the Conde-Duque, conducted by Buckingham and followed by Gondomar, drew near, Charles arose, and made a step towards him, with the evident design of preventing him from kneeling; but the minister would not be stayed, but threw himself at the prince's feet and

kissed his hand, with every manifestation of reverence. When Charles at last raised him, and prayed him to be covered, he refused, though, as a grandee, he was entitled to wear his hat in the presence of his own sovereign. Gondomar paid a similar mark of respect to the prince, and remained uncovered.

"I am come," said Olivarez, in accents of the most profound respect, and with the most deferential demeanour, "in his majesty's name, to welcome your highness to Madrid. The visit was totally unexpected, but it is not the less gratifying on that account, and his majesty conceives himself placed under such deep obligation by the step taken by your highness that he can refuse you nothing."

"I hope I shall not ask more than he will be readily disposed to grant, my lord," replied Charles. "And yet it is in his majesty's power to confer the greatest possible favour upon me."

"Again I say, there is nothing your highness can ask that will be refused," replied Olivarez, bowing. "I should very imperfectly express his majesty's sentiments if I did not say so."

"I trust I shall soon have an opportunity of thanking his majesty in person for his goodness," said Charles.

"His majesty desires to postpone the gratification of receiving your highness at the palace until arrangements can be made for your public entry into Madrid in a manner befitting your dignity. He would fain have visited you this morning, but my lord of Buckingham being opposed to that plan, the king relinquished the idea."

"Buckingham was right," said Charles. "I could not allow his majesty to visit me first."

"In this dilemma," said Olivarez, "his majesty proposes, if it meets with your highness's approval, that you shall drive in the Prado this evening, when he can have the opportunity he so eagerly desires of beholding you. He will come thither attended by the queen, the Infantes his brothers, and the Infanta."

"I entirely approve of the arrangement," remarked Charles. "But I trust his majesty will not allow the day to pass without affording me an opportunity of conversing with him and embracing him."

"Such, I am sure, is his majesty's intent, prince," replied Olivarez. "He is all impatience to greet you. He means to demonstrate his satisfaction at your highness's arrival by a series of triumphs and entertainments such as have never been exhibited in this capital since his majesty came to the throne. In order that the nobility of the court may appear in greater splendour, an edict recently passed against excess in attire shall be suspended. A quarter in the palace, in all respects like that occupied by the king, shall be assigned to your highness and your suite. You shall be attended by as many officers as the king, and be served in the same manner as his majesty. None beneath the rank and quality of a noble shall wait upon you. My brother-in-law, the Conde de Monterey, governor of Italy, a member of the council of state, and a grandee, shall be your mayor-domo mayor. The Conde de Gondomar and the Duke de Cea shall also serve you as mayor-domos. Members of the council of state shall daily attend upon you to ascertain your pleasure; and four grantees—namely, Don Juan Alfonso Euriguez, Admiral of Castile, the Conde de Puebla, the Marquis de Velada, and the Duke de Yjar—shall be ever ready to accompany you when you desire to go abroad. A royal guard of archers shall likewise serve as your escort."

"His majesty is far too gracious to me," said Charles.

"In regard to your highness's entry into the palace," pursued Olivarez, "his majesty desires that the solemnity shall be performed with as much pomp and splendour as would be observed at the coronation of a king of Castile. In accordance with this plan, your highness will be brought from the convent of San Geronimo, whence our kings are wont to make their solemn entry into the city, and conducted by all the principal officers of state, all the chief nobles of the court, and all the public officers, to the palace."

"I lack words to express my gratitude," said Charles.

"Furthermore," pursued Olivarez, "in order that all classes of the community may participate in the joy felt by his majesty at your arrival, he will proclaim a general pardon to all offenders. All prisoners shall be set free."

"El Cortejo will have reason to thank your highness, if he is included in the pardon," remarked Buckingham.

"The royal signature will be given in blank to his highness," said Olivarez, "so that he can extend his grace to whomsoever he may please."

"I will not abuse the privilege," said Charles. "I pray your excellency to thank the king most heartily for his great goodness towards me."

"I have but imperfectly described his majesty's intentions towards your highness," said Olivarez, "but I trust I have said enough to convince you of his earnest desire to please you. And now, having discharged my mission, I will take my leave of your highness."

So saying, the Conde-Duque withdrew with much ceremony.

V

HOW CHARLES DROVE IN THE PRADO, AND HOW HE SAW THE INFANTA IN THE CHAPEL OF THE RECOLETOS AUGUSTINOS.

THOUGH naturally curious to behold the city, Charles did not stir forth during the day, but occupied himself in writing a long letter to his royal father, in which he acquainted him with his safe arrival in Madrid, and described his secret interview with the Infanta, as he felt sure the occurrence would amuse the king. This done, and despatched with another letter from Buckingham by a courier to England, the prince again strolled forth alone into the garden to indulge his meditations without interruption.

Later on, he dined in company with Buckingham and Gondomar. The Earl of Bristol waited upon him during the repast. Dinner over, he entered Gondomar's coach, and, attended by the conde, Buckingham, and Graham, drove to the Prado. The Earl of Bristol followed in his own coach, in which were seated Sir Walter Aston, Cottington, and Endymion Porter.

As the carriage containing the prince traversed the Calle de Alcala, on its way to the Prado, it passed the palace of the Conde-Duque de Olivarez, and Gondomar called Charles's attention to the magnificent edifice. In the court-yard, close to the grand entrance, stood the minister's superb coach, and near it was drawn up a mounted escort.

When the prince entered the Prado the drive was full of equipages, and the walks among the trees were crowded with richly-dressed caballeros and señoras. Nothing could be gayer than the scene. The evening was lovely, and seemed to have tempted forth the whole of the population of Madrid to this charming promenade.

But, besides the beauty of the evening, there was another motive which had brought out all this concourse to the Prado. Promulgated at the palace, the rumour had gone abroad, and was circulated with extraordinary rapidity throughout the city, that the Infanta's suitor, the Prince of Wales, had arrived, and would be seen in the Prado that evening. In consequence of this report, the Madrileños of all ranks flocked thither, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the illustrious stranger.

Nor were they disappointed. It soon became known that the prince was in the Conde de Gondomar's coach, and, as the equipage passed slowly along, all eyes were directed towards it, and Charles was readily distinguished. But the crowd were respectful and unobtrusive, and it being understood that the prince desired to remain incognito, they did not even attempt to cheer him. The noble physiognomy of the prince, his grave looks and dark complexion, delighted all beholders, and it was universally said that he looked like a Castilian. Buck-

ingham likewise attracted great attention, but was not so much admired as the prince.

In the central part of the drive, occupying the space between the Calle de Alcalá and the Calle de San Geronimo, there was a broad open space, surrounded by benches, and terminated at either end by a fountain. This spot, being resorted to by the best company, was known as the "Salon del Prado," a designation which it still retains. In the throng of caballeros careering round the ring, mounted on fiery jennets or beautiful Barbary horses, displaying their graces of horsemanship to the dark-eyed señoras seated on the benches or pacing to and fro on the walks, Charles beheld the chief galants of the city. All that Madrid could produce in the way of splendour of equipage, of fashion and beauty, was to be seen at that moment in the Salon del Prado. There were stately hidalgos, richly-dressed cavaliers, and lovely dames, the latter, it may be mentioned, being universally attired in black, and wearing no other covering to the head except the graceful and becoming mantilla.

But, though the bulk of the crowd was composed of the higher classes, the populace was not excluded from the "Salon," and mingling with the gayest groups might be seen priests, monks, manolos, gitanos, and gallegos. Mounted archers were stationed at various points, but, as we have said, the demeanour of the crowd was so orderly, that their presence was scarcely required.

Charles had driven as far as Nuestra Señora de Atocha, a convent founded by Charles V., and situated at the eastern extremity of the Prado, and had just returned to the "Salon," when a grand procession of carriages, preceded by a mounted escort, was observed to be descending the slope from the Calle de Alcalá. A hundred voices instantly called out, "The king!—the king!" And, on hearing these shouts, Gondomar at once ordered his coachman to halt.

Shortly afterwards the escort, which was proceeding at a foot's pace, rode by, and was followed by the king's

carriage, the large windows of which being open, gave Charles a full view of the illustrious party inside it.

It was evident that Philip was anxiously looking out for the prince, and the moment he caught sight of him he courteously raised his hat, while Charles returned the salutation with equal respect. Not a word, of course, passed between the royal personages, but Philip's speaking glances conveyed the welcome he designed to accord to the prince.

Not less eloquent were the looks of all the rest of the party in the carriage. The Infanta thought the prince could read her heart as he gazed at her, and blushed deeply. The young queen, Elizabeth of France, was enraptured, and as soon as the carriage passed by, she exclaimed, with a glance at the Infanta, "Oh! how handsome he is!"

"By Santiago! he has a noble countenance," cried Philip. "And, strange to say, he looks more like a Spaniard than an Englishman."

The meeting had been watched with great interest by those sufficiently near to observe it, and loud shouts were now raised for the king, but with the good taste which had hitherto marked their proceedings, the crowd still abstained from any direct allusion to the prince.

After the royal carriage came that of the Conde-Duque, and the countess was in ecstasies at the sight of the prince. Then followed a dozen superb carriages belonging to the highest nobility of the court. All these equipages were splendidly gilt and painted, and made a magnificent show.

The grand cortége took its way slowly towards the Recoletos Agustinos, a monastery situated at the western extremity of the Prado, where the royal party designed to alight and pay their devotions, and Gondomar ordered his coachman to follow in the same direction.

Long before the prince's arrival, the royal family had entered the monastery. Charles nevertheless alighted, and was conducted to the chapel, where vespers were being solemnised. To this chapel only the royal family, and

the nobles in immediate attendance upon the king, were admitted, but a word from Gondomar obtained instant entrance to Charles and his companions.

The scene that offered itself to Charles's gaze was striking. Within the chapel were congregated the first nobility of Spain, disposed in various groups. Before the altar knelt the young king, with the queen on his right, and the Infanta on the other side.

When Maria arose from prayer and looked round, the first object she beheld was her lover. A thrill of joy passed through her frame, for she construed his presence in the chapel as a step towards Romanism, and felt sure he would soon worship at the same altar as herself. With more zeal than before, she resumed her devotions, but when she looked round again, Charles was gone.

Before the royal party issued from the monastery night had come on. But innumerable torches were lighted, and being borne by the side of the carriages on their return through the Prado, added greatly to the effect of the procession.

VI.

OF THE MEETING BETWEEN CHARLES AND THE KING IN THE PRADO.

ON the prince's return to the House of Seven Chimneys, he found Olivarez awaiting his arrival.

"The glimpse which his majesty has obtained of your highness," said the minister, "so far from satisfying him, has awakened in his breast such an eager desire for an interview, that he cannot wait till to-morrow, and he hopes, therefore, that you will agree to meet him at midnight in the Prado."

"I am equally impatient to meet his majesty," returned Charles. "In what part of the Prado shall I find him?"

"Near the fountain at the east end," said Olivarez.

"I shall be in attendance. I have a further request to prefer to your highness. It is, that you will graciously allow me to take the Marquis of Buckingham with me, so that on this occasion he may attend upon his majesty."

"Take him by all means," said Charles. "In return, the Conde de Gondomar shall attend upon me. To-night, my lord," he added to Buckingham, "you will consider yourself a Spaniard, and serve the king as faithfully as if you were his subject."

Thereupon, Olivarez and Buckingham quitted the room together.

A little before midnight, attended by Gondomar and the Earl of Bristol, Charles drove to the place of rendezvous appointed by the king. At that hour the Prado was almost deserted. An occasional coach, however, might be seen moving along slowly, while here and there a couple might be observed engaged in amorous converse.

The night was clear and starlight, and as Charles approached the fountain he perceived a coach draw up near it. At a short distance from the carriage, pacing to and fro beneath the trees, could be seen a tall caballero, with his face muffled in his cloak, and a long rapier by his side. As soon as Gondomar caught sight of this personage, he said to Charles, "It is the king."

As the prince's coach stopped, the caballero became motionless, and waited till the prince drew near him. He then threw aside his cloak, and springing towards Charles, embraced him.

"My brother! I am delighted to meet you!" cried Philip.

"Sire, I am equally delighted to meet you," cried Charles.

For more than half an hour the two royal personages walked together among the trees, each with his arm round the other's neck, and both seemingly delighted at the meeting. Philip questioned Charles minutely as to his journey, and appeared greatly interested by all he heard. They also spoke of the Infanta, and Charles had every

reason to believe that the king was quite as eager as himself for the speedy completion of the match.

So charmed were they with each other, that they were loth to separate. But when of necessity the interview came to an end, Philip begged permission to conduct the prince home. Charles with difficulty yielded, and it required some persuasion, and even a little gentle force on Philip's part, to induce the prince to get first into the carriage. "In doing this," he said, "I feel I am disobeying the king my father."

During the drive home Charles sat on the king's right, and although Olivarez and Buckingham were now present, their discourse was as friendly and as free from restraint as it had previously been. The king was very earnest with Olivarez to expedite as much as possible the preparations for the prince's public entry into the city and reception at the palace, and the Conde-Duque promised compliance.

By this time the carriage having arrived at the House of Seven Chimneys, the royal pair separated with every expression of regard.

VII.

OF THE PRESENTS SENT TO CHARLES BY THE KING.

THUS far everything had gone well. Any misgivings that Charles entertained were banished from his breast and gave place to joyful confidence. Unless some wholly unforeseen difficulty arose, it seemed impossible there could now be any serious impediment to the speedy completion of the treaty. Buckingham was quite as sanguine as the prince, and even Bristol, though he had so much experience of Spanish dissimulation, began to think that Olivarez meant to act fairly. Full of joyful anticipations of the future, Charles retired to rest.

Next morning, when Graham entered his chamber, and at the prince's request threw open the casement, the white dove, which had been perched on the window-sill since dawn, flew into the room, and alighted near the couch—so near, that Charles could have touched the beautiful bird if he had extended his hand. There it remained so long as the prince continued in the room.

On descending to the lower room Charles was informed that two large chests had just arrived from the palace, containing sumptuous apparel, and fine linen for himself and his attendants. Other presents were also sent by the king in the course of the day.

Among the few nobles who were presented that day to Charles by the Earl of Bristol was the Conde de Monterey, who, after kneeling and kissing the prince's hand, said,

"I have to inform your highness that it has just been decided by the king and the council of state that your public entrance into the city shall take place at the earliest moment possible, his majesty being naturally anxious to have you as his guest in the palace. The ceremonial has, therefore, been fixed for the day after to-morrow, and will be conducted with the utmost splendour. On these occasions it is customary for the kings and princes of Spain to make their entrance into the city on horseback. Trusting, therefore, that your highness will deign to conform to the arrangements, his majesty has sent by me two white Arabs of the purest race, one of which he prays you to select for your own use on the occasion—the other he himself will ride."

"I will try them both, my lord," replied Charles, courteously, "and that which I deem the least excellent I will retain, leaving the other to the king. I pray you to convey my heartfelt thanks to his majesty for the truly royal gifts he has lavished upon me. I accept them as an evidence of his good will."

"I will deliver your highness's message," said Monterey, bowing profoundly. "Before I depart, let me entreat your highness to command my services in whatsoever way you may think proper. And, in making this

offer, let me add that I speak not for myself, but for the whole court. All are equally devoted to your highness—all eager to serve you.”

With another profound salutation, he then withdrew.

Charles's next visitor was the Duke de Cea, who had just arrived, and flew to pay his respects to the prince.

Charles received the young duke with great cordiality, and diverted him by relating what had happened to the two barbs. De Cea remarked that he had heard of El Cortejo as he crossed the Somosierra, but had not been molested by the robber-chief. After some further discourse, Charles withdrew with Bristol, leaving De Cea and Graham alone together.

“I have news that will delight you, my dear friend,” said the young duke. “I left Doña Casilda and her father at Fuencarrel. They will come on to Madrid this evening, and to-morrow you can present yourself at the casa of the conde. But I cannot conceal from you that he *has* promised his daughter to Don Christobal. Do not, however, be discouraged. Doña Casilda prefers you to your rival. She owed as much to her sister, Doña Flor.”

“You transport me with delight by what you tell me,” cried Graham. “But where is Doña Flor?”

“She is with her father and sister, and will arrive with them this evening. Don Pompeo joined them at Fuencarrel, and it was to avoid meeting him that I came on to Madrid. It seems that his suspicions have been aroused in regard to me, and I shall have to be doubly on my guard in future, for were he to make any discovery, his vengeance would know no bounds.”

“For Doña Flor's sake, I think you ought to give up the affair,” observed Graham.

“Impossible! I love her too well,” said the young duke. “No, I must go on, be the risk what it may. But enough of this. I am curious to hear all that has happened to the prince since his arrival in Madrid.”

Graham then entered into details, and described the

prince's secret interview with the Infanta, with which De Cea was vastly amused.

"The stratagem does great credit to Gondomar," he said, with a laugh, "and was admirably carried out. I hope this will not be the only secret interview the prince will have with his mistress. When he takes up his abode in the palace other opportunities will occur. And as it appears that I am fortunate enough to be appointed one of his highness's lords in waiting, I shall be able to serve him in this respect."

Their conversation was here interrupted by the return of Charles and Bristol, and shortly afterwards Buckingham entered with Olivarez. The Conde-Duque came charged with the most cordial greetings of his royal master, who declared that he could not pass the day without beholding the prince, and therefore entreated his highness to pay him a private visit that evening in the palace.

To this Charles assented, all the more readily because he hoped to see the Infanta. But in that expectation he was disappointed.

Conveyed to the palace by Olivarez, he was met at the foot of a private staircase by his majesty, who was impatiently awaiting his arrival, and who led him to the garden, where they had an hour's conversation together.

At the close of the interview, the king attended Charles to his carriage, and when the prince had entered it his majesty leaped in, and insisted on accompanying him home.

VIII.

HOW THE PRINCE WENT TO THE CONVENT OF SAN GERONIMO.

AT length the day arrived which had been appointed for the prince's public entrance into the city.

A little before noon, Charles and his attendants were assembled in the reception-chamber. The prince was attired in white satin, embroidered with gold. From his neck, sustained by a broad blue riband, hung the George, and beneath his knee he wore the enamelled Garter. All his attendants were attired in the sumptuous apparel sent by the King of Spain, and Buckingham's magnificent person was displayed to the greatest advantage in a doublet of orange-coloured satin, embroidered with leaves of silver, with a mantle to match. His cap was of black silk, enriched with pearls, and adorned with orange-coloured plumes.

Shortly afterwards four grandees were ushered in, all of whom were splendidly attired in cloths of gold and silver for the ceremonial. These were the Marquis de Montes Claros, Don Fernando Giron, the Conde de Gondomar, and the Duke de Cea. After making profound reverences to the prince, they informed him that, in pursuance of the king's orders, they were come to conduct his highness to the convent of San Geronimo.

Thanking them for their courtesy, Charles said he was ready to attend them. Whereupon, with as much ceremony as they could have shown to their own sovereign, they conducted him to a royal carriage which awaited him at the door of the mansion. Beside this superb equipage, which had half a dozen magnificently-caparisoned horses attached to it, there were two other coaches, and a detachment of mounted archers, in their full equipments, were drawn up, to act as an escort to the cortége.

Charles having entered the coach, Buckingham took a seat on his left, while Gondomar and De Cea sat opposite to them, with their backs to the horses. The next carriage was occupied by the Earl of Bristol, Sir Walter Aston, and the two grandees, and the third by the rest of Charles's attendants.

The cavalcade then got into motion, and made its way to the Calle de Alcalá, which was crowded with people in their holiday attire. On beholding the carriage containing Charles, the throng called out lustily, "Viva el Principe de Galles!" Charles bowed repeatedly in acknowledgment of these demonstrations.

The royal convent of San Geronimo, whither the prince was now proceeding, was a large monastic establishment, picturesquely situated on the rising ground on the north side of the Prado, in the midst of the wood. From this convent it was customary for the kings of Castile to make a public entry into the city on the occasion of their coronation, and no greater honour could have been shown to Charles by the Spanish nation than to treat him as one of their own kings.

At the gate of the convent stood the lord prior, ready to receive the prince as he alighted, and all the brethren who were assembled in the hall bowed reverently as Charles passed through it. Having ceremoniously conducted his illustrious guest to the royal apartments, the lord prior left him, and proceeded with the brethren to the chapel, where mass was performed.

Breakfast was then served for Charles and his attendants, and the prince was waited upon by the grandees precisely as Philip himself would have been served.

When the repast was concluded, Charles repaired to the audience-chamber, where a chair of state had been prepared for him, on which he took his seat—the Spanish grandees standing on his right hand, and Buckingham and Bristol on the left. The prince had now to give audience to various important personages, in the same manner as the king. The first to be introduced was the Inquisidor General—a tall, dark man, who seemed well

fitted by his looks for the office he held. Nevertheless, he bent reverently before the heretical prince, and respectfully kissed his highness's hands.

As the Inquisidor General moved on and took his place near the grandees, he was succeeded by the members of the Council-Royal of Castile, all of whom knelt before the prince, those nearest him kissing his hand. Then came the Council-Royal of Aragon; then the Council of Portugal; and after them the Council of Italy, the Council of Military Orders, the Council of the Indies, the Council of the Treasury, and the Council of the Exchequer. Lastly, came Don Juan de Castilla, the Corregidor of Madrid, and Don Lorenzo Olivarez, Don Pedro de Torres, and Don Christobal de Medina, the three principal Regidores. All these important officers knelt before the prince, and after kissing his hand, drew up on either side of the chair of state.

Just as the ceremonial was completed, loud fanfares of trumpets were heard without, and the usher announced that the king and his two royal brothers had arrived at the convent.

On this intelligence Charles immediately arose, and followed by the grandees, together with Buckingham and Bristol, proceeded to the gate of the convent, where he found Philip, who had just alighted with the two Infantes. On seeing Charles, the king flew towards him, and affectionately embraced him.

The two young princes next embraced Charles, after which the royal party returned to the audience-chamber. Here the king and his brothers stood on one side, while all the grandees, nobles, and gentlemen who had attended his majesty, passed before Charles, and kissed his hand.

This done, trumpets were sounded, and a herald came forward, proclaiming that, in honour of the visit of the Prince of Wales, a general pardon would be granted by his majesty to all offenders. With a profound obeisance to the prince, the herald then went forth to make the proclamation in different parts of the city.

On his departure, the heads of each of the councils

advanced towards the prince, and, when they had stationed themselves before him, Philip, who was standing beside Charles, spoke thus:

"Desiring to show all honour to the illustrious Prince of Wales, who is now our guest, we enjoin you, our faithful councillors, and all magistrates and public officers, to do no favour and bestow no office, without his highness's direction, during his abode with us."

"Your majesty's commands shall be obeyed," replied the chief of the Council of Castile, speaking for the rest.

The whole assemblage then shouted, as with one voice, "Viva el Principe de Galles!"

Bowing graciously around, in token of his satisfaction, Philip next took the hand of Charles, and led him to the room in which he had breakfasted. They were followed by the two young princes. While the royal party tarried in this inner room, cates and conserves, with sweet wines of Malaga and Alicante, were served to them by the monks.

IX.

OF THE PRINCE'S PUBLIC ENTRY INTO MADRID.

MEANTIME, the procession had set forth from the convent. At its head rode a band of trumpets and clarions, drums, kettle-drums, cymbals, and fifes, making the air resound with martial strains. The musicians wore cassocks of carnation satin guarded with silver lace, and having black borders cut upon silver tinsel. Their caps were of black velvet adorned with black and carnation plumes. They were all well mounted, and had the royal arms embroidered on the housings of their horses, banners, and pennons.

Next came four trumpeters belonging to the city of

Madrid, clad in cassocks of orange-coloured taffeta laid with silver lace, and wearing black hats adorned with plumes of the same hue as their cassocks. They were followed by a great host of lacqueys habited in similar liveries, each armed with sword and dagger, and carrying a white buckler.

Next came the three Regidores riding together, and the Corregidor riding by himself.

After them came four trumpeters belonging to Don Juan Alfonso Euriguez, Admiral of Castile, in long coats of black satin guarded with gold lace, with the admiral's arms on their breasts, and wearing black hats with yellow and white plumes.

The admiral, who was mounted on a richly-trapped charger, and bore a silver staff, was preceded by fifty lacqueys, wearing doublets of black satin, cloaks fringed with gold, white shoes, and black hats with orange and white plumes.

Then came four trumpeters belonging to Don Pedro de Toledo-Osorio, Marquis of Villa Franca, wearing gaberdines of yellow satin laid with gold lace, with the arms of the house of Toledo woven on their breasts and shoulders. Their hats were of black taffeta, with bands of gold and white plumes.

Don Pedro was preceded by thirty mounted lacqueys in doublets laid with gold lace, with sleeves of tinsel, and hats embroidered with little windmills of gold, and adorned with white plumes and tucks of silver.

Next came four trumpeters belonging to the Conde de Monterey, with cassocks of white satin, laced and flowered with gold, hats of white satin with black plumes, and having the conde's arms embroidered on their bandols.

De Monterey was preceded by a hundred lacqueys, mounted on horses trapped with white and gold, being the colours of the Prince of Wales, and habited in white satin, adorned with leaves of gold, and wearing black hats with black and white plumes.

Next came the trumpeters of the Duke de Cea, in cassocks of blue satin laid with silver, black hats with blue plumes, and having the duke's arms on their trumpets. Before the duke rode fifty lacqueys, mounted on noble chargers, with trappings of velvet adorned with pearls, and having pouncings of gold, silver, and pomegranates. These lacqueys bore white targets with white bandels, and were attired in blue satin covered with silver lace. Their hats were of black satin, with bands of silver and blue plumes.

Next came the trumpeters of Don Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, Duke de Infantado, one of the proudest of the Castilian nobles. These men wore white frizado mantles, with gaberdines of black damask edged with silver lace, with the arms of Mendoza on their shoulders and breasts, as well as on the bandrols of their clarions. Before the old duke rode fifty lacqueys in doublets and hose of black satin, guarded with broad silver lace, and black velvet hats with bands and wreaths of silver, and black and white plumes. Behind him rode fifty grooms in crimson taffeta. The horses were trapped in black and white.

After these followed the trumpeters and lacqueys of Don Diego Lopez, de Zuniga, General of the Coast of Granda. Next those of Don Fernando Giron. Then those of the Marquis of Castel Rodrigo; those of the Castellan of the Cordovas; of the Marquis del Carpio; of the Conde de Saldana, Don Christobal de Gavina, the Conde de Gondomar, and a multitude of others.

The grandees vied with each other in splendour of habiliments and number of attendants.

After the nobles and their attendants had ridden on, there came a dozen trumpeters in carnation satin, with the royal arms woven in gold on their bandrols. They were followed by the king's equerry, his majesty's riders, the royal pages and officers.

Then followed a hundred gentlemen of the royal household, each mounted on a goodly charger, trapped in black and white, with silver musrols, and coverings of crimson

velvet, fringed with gold thread. On these cloths were embroidered the king's name, Felipe IV., with the royal blazon.

Holding the bridle of each horse was a footman in a doublet of carnation satin, laid with silver and black lace, with mantles of cloth of silver. Their hats were black, with silver bands and carnation and black plumes. Then followed the mayor-domos, and after them came the king and the Prince of Wales riding side by side, Charles being placed on his majesty's right hand. Both presented a most majestic appearance—both were perfect horsemen, so that it was impossible to say to whom the palm of superior grace ought to be assigned. Philip was attired in black taffeta richly guarded. His girdle glittered with diamonds, and his black velvet hat, which was surmounted by tall white plumes, was ornamented with priceless jewels. Round his neck was a massive chain of gold, ornamented with green and black emeralds, and representing four crowns linked together. He also wore the orders of the Toison d'Or and Calatrava, and on his mantle was embroidered the red cross of Santiago. The trappings and furniture of the two noble steeds were exactly alike. The manes and tails of the animals were plaited with gold, the bridles and saddles were of red morocco leather embroidered with magnificent pearls, covered with the finest lamb-skins, and the housings were of crimson velvet, garnished and guarded with gold lace.

Behind the two royal personages, mounted on chargers trapped in crimson velvet, embroidered with gold, and adorned with their arms, rode Olivarez and Buckingham, side by side like Philip and Charles—and apparently, from their looks and gestures, the best friends in the world. On this occasion the two favourites acted as masters of the horse to their respective rulers, and each was accompanied by a richly-caparisoned charger, led by a couple of grooms, as a symbol of his office.

Buckingham's habiliments have been already described. Those of Olivarez were of black satin embroidered with

gold, and cut upon silver tinsel, and the haughty minister wore a black hat glittering with diamonds, and adorned with black plumes striped with gold.

A crowd of richly-attired pages followed. Then came the Earl of Bristol and Sir Walter Aston, followed by Charles's three attendants, Graham, Cottington, and Eudymion Porter, all of whom made a gallant show. The rear of the long and magnificent cortége was brought up by a detachment of the Almayn guard, under the command of the Conde de Barrajás.

The setting forth of Philip and Charles from the Convent of San Geronimo was announced by a peal of ordnance, and thereupon all the bells of the city began to ring joyously. Thousands of persons were collected in the Prado to witness the procession, and their continuous shouts rent the air. When Philip and Charles came in sight, these acclamations were redoubled.

After traversing the Salon del Prado, the cortége proceeded to the Calle de Alcalá, and as the king and the prince approached the street, four-and-twenty regidores of the city, gorgeously arrayed in cloth of tissue, met them, bearing a superb canopy, which they held over the king and his guest during their progress through the city. We may mention that this superb canopy was afterwards presented by the regidores to Buckingham.

From the court-yard of the palace of the Conde-Duque three hundred gentlemen in the minister's livery, and bearing his arms, and all well mounted, came forth to join the procession. They were under the command of Don Luis de Haro, son of the Marquis del Carpio, and nephew of the Conde-Duque.

As may be supposed, the Calle de Alcalá was densely crowded, but a road was preserved for the cavalcade by mounted archers and arquebusiers. In the widest part of the street, beyond the palace of the Conde-Duque, large scaffolds were erected, covered with rich cloths and tapestry, and these were now occupied by the various councils and important functionaries who had just been to pay homage to the prince.

All the habitations were decorated with costly stuffs, cloths of gold and silver, carpets and hangings, and, in some cases, pictures were hung out. The balconies and windows were filled with fair spectators, who waved their kerchiefs as the king and prince passed by. Not even at Philip's coronation had so much enthusiasm been displayed. Poems were improvised in the prince's honour, and the following refrain to a song, composed for the occasion by the famous Lope de Vega, was everywhere chanted:

Carlos Estuardo soy,
Que, siendo amor mi guía,
Al cielo de España voy
Por ver my estrella Maria.

Charles Stuart was indeed the hero of the hour. The story of his romantic expedition had been everywhere recounted, and had roused the strongest sympathies of a generous and impulsive people. The prince's distinguished appearance and majestic deportment more than realised the notions that had been formed of him, and all tongues were loud in his praise. Moreover, it had been artfully insinuated by the priesthood, at the instigation of Olivarez, that not only had Charles come to claim the Infanta, but that he intended to recant his heresies and embrace the faith of Rome, and this fiction being firmly believed by the populace, there was no drawback to the general rejoicing.

At the Puerta del Sol a stage was erected, on which was performed a ballet, introducing the best national dances. The fountain in the midst of the plaza ran with wine, and all the houses in the Calle Mayor were as richly adorned as those in the Calle de Alcalá.

As he entered the grand plaza in front of the Palacio Real, a magnificent spectacle was offered to the prince. The whole of the cavalcade was here drawn up, and was surrounded by the royal guard in their full accoutrements. The clangour of the trumpet, the clash of the cymbal, the thunder of the kettle-drum, and the shrill notes of the fife, were heard from the band which was

stationed near the principal gate of the palace. Towards this gate, which we have already mentioned retained its original Moorish character, Philip and Charles now proceeded amid the deafening acclamations of the spectators.

At the gate they were met by Don Luis de Paredes, alcaide of the palace, with a number of gentlemen of the household, and were ceremoniously conducted to the grand portal, where the king and his royal guest alighted. Fain would Charles have taken the hindmost place, but this Philip would not permit, and the point of etiquette was at last adjusted, as it had been before, by their walking side by side, each with an arm on the other's shoulder. In this fraternal fashion, which excited the admiration of all who beheld them, and preceded by the Conde de Puebla and the Conde de Benavente, mayor-domos, they repaired to her majesty's quarter.

They found the queen in a large and splendidly furnished apartment, at the upper end of which was a canopy of gold tissue adorned with the arms of Castile and Aragon. On either side of the canopy were ranged the queen's *meninos* and *meninas*, habited in rose-coloured satin, and beneath it were placed gilt chairs, covered with crimson velvet, on which the queen and the Infanta were seated, but on the entrance of Charles with the king, the two royal ladies at once arose and advanced to meet him.

Her majesty was splendidly arrayed in a robe of cloth of silver, and literally blazed with diamonds. The Infanta was far more simply attired in white satin, and her sole ornaments were pearls. She blushed deeply as she returned Charles's profound salutation, and when addressed by him she trembled and manifested considerable agitation. The prince augured well from this display of feeling. The royal party next proceeded to the canopy, where Charles was placed between the queen and the Infanta, and where they all remained for some time in conversation. But in spite of his efforts, Charles failed to draw the Infanta into discourse. She listened with evident

interest to what he said, and sometimes smiled, but silence seemed imposed upon her by the frigid rules of Spanish etiquette. On the other hand, the queen was extremely lively.

Half an hour was spent in this way, and at the expiration of that time his majesty proposed to conduct the prince to his quarter of the palace. As Charles withdrew, the queen and the Infanta accompanied him to the door.

A magnificent suite of apartments, equal in extent to those occupied by his majesty, had been assigned to the prince. They were situated in that part of the palace which enjoyed the finest view, and overlooked the gardens and the valley of the Manzanares. At the back was a patio surrounded by marble arcades, and filled with orange-trees. When the king and the prince entered the noble gallery belonging to the apartments in question, they were met by the Conde de Monterey, who had been appointed the prince's mayor-domo mayor, and the Conde de Gondomar and the Duke de Cea, his highness's mayor-domos, and were ceremoniously ushered into a grand reception-chamber, where they found the Conde-Duque de Olivarez, the Duque de Infantado, the Admiral of Castile, the Marquis del Castel Rodrigo, and all the first grandees of Spain. With them were the Marquis of Buckingham, the Earl of Bristol, Sir Walter Aston, Graham, and the rest of Charles's attendants.

The grandees raised their hats to Charles, but immediately replaced them.

While the royal pair were still standing together, the Conde de Monterey delivered two gold keys to his majesty, who took them, and, presenting them to Charles, said:

"These keys will open all the doors of the palace to you. Your highness will bestow them as you deem meet."

Returning suitable thanks, Charles immediately gave one key to Buckingham, and the other to Bristol.

Shortly afterwards, the large doors at the upper end

of the chamber were thrown open, and an usher announced that the banquet was served.

Amid flourishes of trumpets, and marshalled by the Conde de Monterey and the two other mayor-domos, Philip and Charles, walking side by side, passed into the banqueting-chamber, where a grand repast awaited them.

At the upper end of the long table, on which was a gorgeous display of gold plate, was a dais, with a canopy above it emblazoned with the arms of England. Here seats were placed for Philip and Charles, who were waited upon by Gondomar and De Cea.

At the close of the banquet, the king and prince, with all the court, drove forth to witness the rejoicings that were taking place in the city. When night came on, all the houses were illuminated, and immense bonfires were lighted in the public places. At midnight, a grand display of fireworks took place in the Salon del Prado.

With shouts of welcome ringing in his ears, Charles returned to his apartments in the Palacio Real.

End of the Third Book.

BOOK IV.—FIESTAS REALES.

I.

HOW CHARLES PASSED HIS TIME AT THE PALACE.

FOR more than a fortnight Charles had now occupied the magnificent suite of apartments assigned him by the king in the royal palace. He was treated with as much state and ceremony as Philip himself, served by grandees, consulted by the heads of the different councils and other officials, attended by a princely retinue of servants, and escorted by a guard of mounted archers whenever he stirred abroad. During all this time the royal festivities had continued, and splendid entertainments were given, at which the whole court assisted. Rejoicings were also held throughout the city, and bonfires blazed nightly in all the public places.

Nothing was talked about but the approaching royal marriage, and it was universally believed that the ceremonial was only delayed until the prince had publicly abjured his heresies, and conformed to the faith of Rome. The latter opinion was somewhat shaken by the arrival of two English chaplains, Doctors Man and Wren. These Protestant divines were regarded with so much dislike at the palace, that they were compelled to take up their abode with the Earl of Bristol at the House of Seven Chimneys.

By this time so many English nobles and persons of distinction had arrived in Madrid, that Charles was able to keep up a court of his own at the palace, and his ante-chamber was daily crowded. Among the first to join the prince were the Earl of Carlisle, with the Lords Mountjoy and Kensington, each of whom brought with him a retinue of servants and a supply of horses. The next to arrive were Lord Andover and Sir Robert Carr,

gentlemen of the bed-chamber to the prince. Next came Lord Vaughan, the prince's comptroller, and with him Archie, the court fool, who had claimed fulfilment of James's promise to allow him to visit Madrid. Then came Lords Hay, Rochford, and Montague, with Sir George Goring, Sir Thomas Jermyn, Sir John Wentworth, and many others, bringing with them rich habiliments, tilting furniture, horses, jewels, and other ornaments for the prince and Buckingham, who were thus enabled to make a display befitting their dignity.

Buckingham also was gratified in an especial manner. A patent, by which he was created Earl of Coventry and Duke of Buckingham, was sent him by his royal master. Sir Francis Steward, the bearer of the patent, also brought with him the insignia of the Garter for the newly-made duke, together with the gorgeous robes of the Order, to be worn by the prince and Buckingham on Saint George's Day.

"I send you also," wrote James to his two bairns, "the robes of the Order, which you must not forget to wear on Saint George's Day, and dine together in them, if they come in time, which I pray God they may, for it will be a goodly sight for the Spaniards to see my two boys dine in them."

The accession of rank which he had thus acquired was especially gratifying to Buckingham, as it placed him on a level with Olivarez. But his arrogance was greatly increased, and became almost insufferable. Though Olivarez unquestionably exercised as much influence over Philip as Buckingham did over Charles, the haughty minister treated his royal master with every outward show of respect. Not so Buckingham, who even ventured to seat himself in the prince's presence—an unpardonable breach of etiquette in the opinion of the grandees, who could not understand how the prince tolerated such familiarity. Nothing but consideration for Charles prevented many of them, provoked almost beyond endurance by the favourite's insolence, from coming to an open rupture with him. Buckingham, however, seemed utterly

indifferent to their opinion, regarding the Spaniards with ill-disguised scorn, and treating them with unbecoming levity. In the midst of a grave discussion he would break off suddenly with the snatch of a song, as if to manifest the little impression produced upon him by the conference, or snapping his fingers like castanets, would amuse himself by practising a bolero or a seguidilla. After a time, the only influential person in the Spanish cabinet who remained constant to him was the Conde de Gondomar.

Digby's grave and courteous manners were favourably contrasted with those of Buckingham, and general regret was expressed that the prince did not prefer him to the capricious, frivolous, and overbearing favourite. In the hope of lowering Bristol in the esteem of the Spanish cabinet and court, Buckingham lost no opportunity of slighting him; but he did not succeed in his design, and had the mortification of discovering that the discreet ambassador was preferred to himself by the king and his minister.

This dissension between Buckingham and his colleague was singularly unfortunate for Charles, as it rendered unanimity in his councils impossible; any proposition made by Bristol, however judicious, being opposed by Buckingham. Hence constant difficulties were created.

But while Buckingham was raising up against himself a host of enemies, and the English nobles, aping his manner, were rendering themselves obnoxious to the Spaniards by their insolence, Charles lost none of his popularity. His gracious manner and dignified deportment delighted all who approached him; and so friendly was the intercourse between him and the king, that Philip began to feel a real affection for his expected brother-in-law. The two exalted personages rode forth frequently together, and amused themselves with hawking on the plains in the valley of the Manzanares, or in chasing the wild-boar, the wolf, and the fox, in the woods of a royal domain called El Pardo, about three or four leagues from Madrid.

But though Charles had every reason to be satisfied with the attention shown him by the king, he was wofully disappointed in the main object of his visit. His suit with the Infanta made little or no progress. He saw her daily, it is true, either at some grand entertainment in the palace, or in the royal carriage when she drove in the Prado; but he found it impossible to obtain any private discourse with her. Her manner towards him was so constrained and formal that he was almost driven to despair. De Cea had undertaken to obtain him a private interview with her, but since the prince's arrival at the palace she had been so closely watched, that hitherto the young duke had failed in the attempt.

So annoyed was Charles by the treatment he experienced, that one day he remonstrated on the subject with the king.

"I fear my visit will be in vain, sire," he said. "I cannot flatter myself that I make the slightest progress in your sister's good graces. I know not how to express myself otherwise than by saying that she surrounds herself with an icy atmosphere that chills me as I approach. As her accepted suitor, methinks I ought to be allowed somewhat greater freedom."

"I admit the justice of your complaint, prince," said Philip, "but it is not in my power to relax in the slightest degree the forms prescribed by etiquette in regard to my sister. But rest assured, though her manner is necessarily cold and formal in reality she is strongly attached to you."

"I should feel perfectly easy if I could have such an assurance from her own lips, sire," remarked Charles.

"It is impossible she can so satisfy you until after the espousals, when her position will be altered," said Philip. "Meantime, I am aware of her sentiments, and can speak for her."

Charles made no reply, but said to himself, "I will see her at all hazards."

II.

MADRID FROM THE MONTANA DEL PRINCIPE PIO.

ON the morning after the conversation just recorded took place between the king and the prince, at an early hour three persons of noble mien ascended the path leading to the summit of the *Montaña del Principe Pio*, a hill situated at the north-west side of Madrid.

Apparently their object was to obtain a view of the city, which the eminence in question afforded, for as soon as they had selected an advantageous position, they stood still and gazed around, carefully noting the various objects that came under their observation.

On the brow of the hill, immediately in their rear, and completely commanding the city with its ordnance, was a strong square fort surrounded by ramparts. From a standard planted on the highest point of this redoubt the royal banner floated in the morning breeze, while armed men paced to and fro on the walls.

We have already mentioned that it was not until Philip II. fixed his residence in Madrid that it became the capital of Spain, and it was chiefly during his reign and that of his son, Philip III., that the city had been extended and embellished. Hence, if at the period of our history Madrid could boast of little antiquity, it had other merits in the eyes of the persons who now regarded it. Well built, laid out with a certain regularity, it had several broad and handsome streets, many noble plazas adorned with fountains and statues, a large park, and royal gardens, to which the public had access. The architecture of its habitations, if not picturesque, had an imposing character, and many of the palaces of the nobility were of vast size and very stately appearance.

From the *Montaña del Principe Pio*, which was only separated by a valley from the palace, an admirable view

of that truly regal structure was obtained. Indeed, from no other spot could it be seen to so much advantage. From the same heights, also, the royal gardens were discernible, as well as the Casa del Campo, a delightful country residence belonging to the king on the farther side of the shallow Manzanares.

The attention, however, of the three persons was chiefly engrossed by the city. After counting the gates, commencing with the Puerta de Segovia, which was a little to the south of the palace, passing on to the Puerta de Toledo, and thence to the Puerta de Atocha, they followed the Prado till they came to the Puerta de Alcalá, and completed their survey with the Puerta de Bilbao. All the more prominent features of the city were thus brought before them, and they were enabled to form an accurate notion of its general appearance and extent.

One of the party, who acted as cicerone to the others, next pointed out the principal streets—the Calle de Alcalá and the Calle Mayor, which traversed the city from east to west, running from the Prado to the royal palace—the Calle de Atocha, the Calle de Geronimo, and the Calle de Toledo. Having traced the streets, they turned to the plazas, and readily distinguished those of San Joachim, La Cevado, and San Domingo, the Puerta del Sol, and the Plaza Mayor. The churches and convents next claimed attention, and the guide pointed out San Domingo el Real, founded in the thirteenth century; Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion, built at the close of the fifteenth century; the monastery of the Descalzes Reales, founded by Juana, daughter of Charles V.; La Encarnacion, built some years previously by Margaret of Austria, mother of Philip IV; and several others—none of them, however, with much pretension to architectural beauty. From streets, plazas, churches, and public buildings, the guide came to private mansions, and while pointing out the residences of the chief nobility, indicated the abode of Don Pompeo de Tarsis in the Calle Ancha de San Bernardo, the Casa Saldana, and, lastly, the House of Seven Chimneys.

Their survey of the city completed, the party suffered their gaze to stray over its environs. In the bare and tawny plain in which Madrid is situated there is little on which the eye can rest with pleasure—no green pastures, no woods, nothing but a vast tract of stony country, dreary and desolate almost as a wilderness. There was scarcely any water in the channel of the Manzanares—the only river to be seen in the neighbourhood. An impressive aspect, however, was given to the vast stony plains by the ranges of lofty snow-clad mountains by which they were bounded; and though these mountainous chains—the Somosierra and the Guadarrama—were many leagues off, the atmosphere was so clear that the rifts on their sides and their jagged peaks could be clearly distinguished. Moreover, amidst this stony waste there were a few green spots. A forest could here and there be seen, with a hunting-seat attached to it. These forests formed part of the royal domains, and abounded with wild-boar and deer. El Pardo Zarsuela, to which the king often resorted to recreate himself with the chase, was pointed out by the cicerone, who also showed his companions another beautiful country-seat belonging to Philip, called La Florida. Lastly, he directed their attention to the king's favourite retreat, El Buen Retiro, situated at the east side of the Prado, and renowned for its delightful gardens.

Upwards of an hour having been spent in this survey of the city and its environs, the person who had acted as cicerone on the occasion, and who was no other than the Conde de Gondomar, said to the chief of his companions:

"Is there anything further I can show your highness?"

"No, I am quite satisfied," replied Charles. "I have now got as perfect a notion of Madrid as if I had dwelt all my life in the city."

"What think you of the city, my lord duke?" inquired Gondomar, turning to the other.

"I like it better than I did at first," returned Buck-

ingham. "But I hope I shall not offend you, count, if I confess that I am a little disappointed."

"Offend me! not in the least," replied Gondomar, smiling. "I can bear to hear Madrid abused without feeling my self-love hurt. Nay, I am so much of an Englishman, that I prefer London. Still, I think it a fine city."

"So it is," cried Charles, "a very fine city. Those lofty mountains, with their snowy peaks—even the bare plains by which it is surrounded—add greatly to its effect. If it has no monuments of antiquity—no picturesque structures replete with historical associations—it has at least broad streets, spacious plazas, and noble habitations. Above all, it has a magnificent palace."

"To say nothing of a river without water," remarked Buckingham. "I see the bed of the Manzanares, but can discern no stream."

"The channel is dry now," said Gondomar. "But at times it contains a torrent. If your highness is satisfied, we will proceed to the Casa del Campo. It is about the hour when the Infanta will go there."

"Is it not too early as yet?" remarked Charles.

"The princess rises betimes," returned Gondomar, "and the morning is so fine that it is certain to tempt her forth. I will engage you shall see her."

"Nay then, let us not tarry a moment longer," cried Charles

III.

LA CASA DEL CAMPO.

THE party then hastily descended the hill, and proceeded along a road skirting the walls of the royal gardens, laid out on the ancient Campo del Moro. This road brought them to a handsome stone bridge across the Manzanares, or rather across the almost dry bed of that generally insignificant stream. Opposite them, on the farther bank of the river, was the Casa del Campo, a small palace belonging to the king, the chief attraction of which was its charming garden.

To this delightful retreat the Infanta frequently repaired in the early morning, when she was likely to be unobserved. Just as Charles and his attendants had crossed the bridge, two royal carriages were seen approaching, and the prince, whose beating heart informed him that his mistress was at hand, stepped out of the road to allow them to pass.

As he had anticipated, the first carriage contained the princess. She was attended by Doña Elvira and the old Duke del Infantado. As Charles caught her eye, she at once recognised him, and uttered a cry of delight and surprise, but her vivacity was quickly checked by the severe looks of Doña Elvira.

"It is the prince!" exclaimed Maria.

"The prince!" echoed the old duke, in surprise, and with a look of displeasure. "What is he doing abroad at this hour? You did not expect to behold him, princess?"

"Certainly not," she replied.

"He cannot be admitted to the casa while you are there, princess," said Doña Elvira. "I will not allow any meeting between you."

"The prince has no such design, I am quite sure," said the Infanta.

"I hope not," rejoined Doña Elvira, severely. "But I shall take measures to prevent it."

"Quite right, señora," remarked the old duke, approvingly.

By this time the carriage had reached the casa, and was driven into the court-yard, where the princess and the two persons with her alighted. The second coach contained four meninas, who likewise alighted and followed the princess into the palace. Doña Elvira's first order was that the outer gates should be immediately closed, and no one, of whatever rank, or under any pretext, admitted during the stay of the Lady Infanta.

"These precautions are quite unnecessary," said the Infanta, scarcely able to conceal her vexation; "but I suppose you feel bound to take them."

"His majesty would blame me if anything occurred," replied Doña Elvira.

"You cannot be too particular, señora," said the duke.

The Infanta made no remark, but passing through the open windows of a saloon, entered the garden. Evidently anxious to be alone, she walked quickly on, and as Doña Elvira was now quite free from apprehension, she did not attempt to hasten after her, but followed at a leisurely pace with the old duke. The meninas, enchanted to be freed from restraint, scattered themselves in different directions, and began to gather flowers.

Meantime, the Infanta continued to hurry on until she reached a more retired part of the garden. She was pursuing a shady path, when a noise attracted her attention, and she perceived a man on the summit of the garden wall. It was the prince. A cry escaped her at the sight, and she hardly knew whether to remain or fly. While she was in this state of indecision, Charles leaped lightly to the ground, and hastened towards her.

"Fortune indeed has favoured me, princess," he cried, flinging himself on his knee before her and taking her hand. "I have entered this retreat, scarcely hoping to find you, but chance has brought me to you at once."

"You have done wrong to come here at all, prince,"

she rejoined. "But you must not stay. I would not have you discovered for the world. Strict orders have been given by Doña Elvira that you are not to be admitted to the casa, and if she finds you here she will think the meeting has been preconcerted."

"Let her think what she pleases, Maria," cried Charles. "I will not go. I cannot tear myself from you. I am never able to obtain a moment's private converse with you—never allowed to breathe my passion to you. Why should I be treated with all this form and coldness? Am I not your suitor? Why, then, should I be debarred from approaching you?"

"Because such is the custom in this court, prince," she replied. "A princess of the royal blood of Spain is not allowed any interchange of affection with her suitor until after their espousals. It is against her honour, and would be accounted a reproach to her to see him alone. I must, therefore, beseech you to leave me instantly."

"Thus enjoined, I must needs obey you, Maria," cried Charles, rising.

"Stay, prince," she exclaimed, checking him. "I would not have you think me indifferent to you. Etiquette compels me to hide my feelings—to treat you as a stranger, with coldness and reserve. But I find it a hard part to play. Pity me, Charles—pity me—but do not blame me."

"Then you do love me, Maria?" he cried, rapturously.

"Can you doubt it, Charles, after what I have just said?" she replied, with a tenderness in her accents which they had never before betrayed. "But since nothing less will content you, I will own that I love you—love you dearly."

"My doubts are dispelled. My happiness is complete," cried the prince. "Oh! Maria, all I have undergone for your sake is more than requited."

"Oh, Charles!" she rejoined. "Henceforth you will understand me better. If I am compelled to act coldly towards you—to remain mute when you address me—

you will know what is passing within. You will forgive me."

"You are an angel," he exclaimed.

And, carried away by his passion, he clasped her in his arms.

In an instant all the chains that etiquette had bound around the Infanta were broken. She did not attempt to disengage herself from her lover's embrace, but looked up tenderly in his face. Thus did they gaze at each other for a moment, and then their lips met.

"Maria, my beloved, I thus vow eternal fidelity to you," he cried.

"Charles, I am yours for ever. I swear it!" she rejoined, with equal fervour.

Thinking only of themselves, forgetting all the world beside, utterly unconscious of danger, they were still gazing fondly at each other, when the Infanta suddenly started.

"Fly, prince!" she cried. "Footsteps are approaching."

"A minute longer!" he implored.

"Not a second," she rejoined, "or we shall be discovered."

Scarcely were the words uttered than Doña Elvira and the Duke del Infantado issued from a side-path. If some dreadful spectacle had met her sight the dueña could not have looked more aghast.

"Holy Mother!" she exclaimed, with a scream. "Look, duke! look! There they are together. Oh! I shall expire."

"Compose yourself, señora. You will have need of all your faculties," cried the old duke.

IV.

THE DUKE DEL INFANTADO.

FOR a few moments no movement was made on either side. Doña Elvira did not advance, expecting the Infanta to come to her, but the princess did not stir, neither did Charles relinquish her hand. The Duke del Infantado, whom we have already described as one of the proudest of the Castilian nobles, then stepped forward, and, making a profound obeisance to the Infanta, said,

"Permit me, princess, to conduct you to your governess."

She made no reply, but consulted Charles by a look.

"Do not forget that you are a daughter of the blood royal of Spain," said the old duke. "Do not forget what is due to the king your brother."

"I am not likely to forget what is due either to myself or to the king," rejoined the Infanta, proudly.

And she gave her hand to the old duke, who took it with the most profound respect, and delivered her to Doña Elvira, who by this time had come up.

He then turned to Charles, and, making as deep a reverence as that he had just addressed to the Infanta, said, in accents of grave respect,

"Your highness will be pleased to excuse me. In the discharge of my office as governor of the Lady Infanta, I must entreat your highness to retire. I shall have the honour of attending you to the garden gate."

Charles did not return the old duke's salutation, but, regarding him with a lofty look, said,

"I shall use my own pleasure as to leaving the garden, my lord duke."

"Be not offended with me, noble prince," remonstrated the old duke. "Under any other circumstances, I would

entreat your highness to remain here as long as might be agreeable to you—indeed, as his majesty's representative, I would place this garden and palace at your disposal—but I beseech you now to depart."

"No more, my lord duke," rejoined Charles, coldly. "I have said that I shall consult my own pleasure as to the time and mode of my departure."

"Prince," cried the duke, casting himself at Charles's feet, "I am an old man—old enough to be your grand-sire—and my long life has been free from reproach. I am also head of the oldest and proudest family of Castile, whose scutcheon is without stain. Do not bring disgrace and dishonour upon me. Do not let it be said that I neglected my trust. The Infanta is confided to my care, and I am answerable for her with my head. I do not blame your highness for the rash step you have just taken, because you have been incited to it by overpowering passion, which has blinded you to the consequences."

"What are the consequences, my lord duke?" said Charles, still maintaining a haughty and inflexible deportment.

"Death and dishonour to me, prince," replied the duke—"punishment little less severe to Doña Elvira—immurement in a convent to the Lady Infanta—and a certain rupture between his majesty and your highness."

"Tut! tut! you magnify the matter, my lord," said Charles, incredulously.

"Highness," rejoined the old duke, in a sad and reproachful voice, "the word of Juan Hurtado de Mendoza has never yet been doubted. By my father's soul, I speak the truth! Were my own life merely in jeopardy, I would urge you no further. But wrong will be done to others far greater than myself. The Infanta will suffer—the king himself suffer—all the grandees of Spain will suffer by this violation of Spanish etiquette. Were he so minded, his majesty could not pass over the injury to his honour."

"No injury has been done to the king's honour, duke,"

said Charles. "I am the Infanta's suitor. Her hand has been promised me by his majesty. She herself has accepted me. I seek a momentary interview with her in private. I obtain it—that is all."

"Heaven keep all knowledge of the interview from my royal master!" cried the duke. "From me he shall never hear of it. As I have affirmed, he must resent it. Our nice sense of honour requires that no Castilian princess of the blood shall exchange a word in private with the suitor for her hand until after their espousals. This rule your highness has infringed. But I beseech you to reflect—for your own sake—for the sake of the Infanta—before you make the consequences of the step irretrievable."

"Rise, I pray you, my lord duke," said Charles, raising him. "You have convinced me. I see the error I have committed. I thank you for the devotion you have displayed to the Infanta—to my future consort. I will do as you desire."

"Nobly decided, prince," said the old duke.

While the Duke del Infantado had been thus pleading with the prince, the Infanta remained standing at a little distance with Doña Elvira, resisting all the attempts of the latter to induce her to withdraw. She now stepped towards them, and with great dignity of manner said to the duke,

"My lord, after what has passed between you and the prince relative to my brief interview with his highness, I think it right to tell you that we have plighted our faith, and that I regard him as my husband."

"You have not the power so to plight yourself, princess," rejoined the duke, "and therefore the promise is not binding."

"You are mistaken, my lord," said the Infanta, haughtily; "my promise is inviolable. I will wed no other than Charles Stuart, unless he himself shall discharge me from my pledge."

"Do not deceive yourself, princess," said the old duke, "and do not mislead the prince. Unless such promises

are solemnly ratified, and by the consent of the king your brother, they are of no account."

"I hold *my* promise sacred, my lord duke," cried Charles, "and I call upon you to attest it."

"Mine is equally sacred. Bear witness to my words, my lord," added the Infanta.

"I hear—I hear," exclaimed the duke, with some impatience, "but I tell you the king would hold such promises as nought, were they reported to him, which they never will be by me, for my lips will remain always sealed in regard to this meeting. That you may be speedily united is my heartfelt wish, and that no impediment may arise to that consummation of all our hopes, I would urge his highness's immediate departure."

"Yes, you must go, prince—indeed you must," cried the Infanta. "So far the duke is right. If you are discovered, my brother will be so offended that I tremble for the consequences to us all. Adios!"

She then tripped towards Doña Elvira, and, having joined her, hurried along the path leading to the casa. After proceeding to some distance, Maria turned and perceived the prince still standing where she had left him, watching her. It being evident that he would not stir as long as she continued in sight, she waved an adieu to him, and turned into a side-path.

"I am ready now, my lord," said Charles, as the Infanta disappeared.

Not a word passed between them as they pursued their way, following the course of the wall that bounded the garden, but when at last they reached the gate, the old duke said,

"I shall take no precautions, feeling assured your highness will not attempt to scale this garden wall again."

"Have no fear, my lord duke," replied Charles. "I shall not repeat the visit."

The gate was then unlocked, and Charles passed through it. Shortly afterwards he was joined by Buckingham and Gondomar, who were waiting for him.

V.

THE CASA SALDANA.

THE Casa Saldana was a large mansion, delightfully situated in the Paseo de Recoletos, which formed a continuation of the Prado; and though in the midst of all the life and gaiety of Madrid, it had some of the advantages of a country-house, possessing large and delightful gardens, and being surrounded by a wood, to which the conde had private access.

When Graham paid his first visit to the casa he was received with open arms by the old conde, who appeared enchanted to see him, and renewed all his former expressions of gratitude for the service rendered by Graham to himself and his daughter. He also spoke of his surprise on learning that his deliverers were no other than the Prince of Wales and his attendants. The conde was alone at the time, and when Graham inquired after Doña Casilda, the old hidalgo told him she was in the garden, and at once conducted him thither. On issuing forth, and crossing a trimly-kept grass-plot, bordered by flower-beds, they found Doña Casilda seated in an arbour with two other persons, who proved to be her sister, Doña Flor, and Don Pompeo de Tarsis.

Casilda greeted her lover with undisguised delight. Graham thought her looking lovelier than ever, and certainly she was seen to much greater advantage than she had been after the robber attack in the gorge of Pan-corbo. Her costume was the same as that worn by every other Spanish lady—namely, a black silk dress edged with magnificent lace, and a mantilla. Nothing could have better suited her beauty than this attire. Her jetty tresses—so intensely black that they looked almost blue

—were adorned by a blush rose fastened at the side of her head, and she shielded herself from the sun with her fan. After their first greetings were over, Doña Casilda introduced him to Doña Flor and Don Pompeo.

“This is Don Ricardo—my gallant deliverer—of whom you have heard me speak so often,” said Casilda, presenting him to her sister.

A blush overspread Doña Flor’s features as she returned Graham’s salutation.

“I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Don Ricardo,” she said. “I believe you are a friend of the Duke de Cea. I have heard him speak of you, and in very flattering terms.”

Evidently the reference to the Duke de Cea did not operate as a recommendation to Don Pompeo, for he bowed very stiffly when Graham was presented to him.

Shortly afterwards the old conde and his son-in-law quitted the arbour, leaving Graham to the two ladies, with whom he engaged in a very lively conversation. After awhile Doña Flor made some excuse for quitting them, and Graham was then enabled to pour forth his love, which he did in the most passionate terms. There was nothing perhaps in the words, but the unmistakable fervour with which they were uttered gave them the force of the most eloquent pleading. Coming direct from the heart of the speaker, they made their way at once to the heart of her who listened to them. Casilda’s heightened colour and agitation proclaimed their effect upon her. But she cast down her eyes, and did not dare to meet Graham’s gaze.

“You do not answer me, Casilda,” he cried, at last. “You do not love me.”

“Oh, do not say so, Ricardo!” she rejoined, raising her magnificent black eyes, and fixing them tenderly upon him. “Yes, yes, I love you. But do you not know that my father has promised me to another?”

“I have heard so,” replied Graham. “But he will not force you to wed against your inclinations.”

"My father is a Castilian, Ricardo, and unless Don Christobal de Gavina will release him from his promise, he must fulfil it."

"But you—you will never consent, Casilda?" cried Graham.

"Alas! I shall not be consulted," she replied.

Just as the words were uttered, a young richly-dressed cavalier was seen to issue from the open window of the casa, and make his way across the grass-plot towards the arbour. This personage, who had a distinguished air, was tall—very tall for a Spaniard—well made, and handsome. His complexion was swarthy, his eyes dark and full of fire. He was attired in a doublet and mantle of black velvet laced with silver, and had tall white plumes in his black hat.

A strange feeling crossed Graham as he regarded this personage, and seemed to warn him of the approach of an enemy.

The look of inquiry which he addressed to Casilda was thus answered, "Yes, it is Don Christobal."

"I felt sure of it," he mentally ejaculated. "By Heaven! he is no contemptible rival."

Shortly afterwards the two young men were brought face to face, and Don Christobal, who proved to be extremely courteous, manifested no displeasure on finding his intended bride conversing with a handsome stranger. On the contrary, he seemed pleased to make Graham's acquaintance. His presence, however, operated as a restraint to Graham and Doña Casilda, and little more passed between them. By this time the rest of the party had returned to the arbour, and the conversation, which had now become general, began to turn upon the prince's visit to Madrid, and Doña Flor and her sister both expressed great anxiety to know when his highness's nuptials with the Infanta would be solemnised.

"We must apply to you, Don Ricardo," remarked Don Christobal, turning to Graham. "You must be well informed. Is the day yet fixed?"

"I have not heard so," returned Graham.

"In my opinion, the prince's gallantry deserves a prompt reward," said Doña Casilda. "The marriage ought to take place immediately."

"The Pope's consent has to be obtained, and his Holiness seems in no hurry to give it," observed Graham.

"Everybody says the prince is about to become a convert," pursued Casilda. "I hope it is true, and then perhaps all his suite will follow his example."

"If the prince becomes a proselyte, I will, señora," replied Graham.

"You think you can safely make that promise, I suppose, señor," laughed Casilda.

"The prince only needs to be freed from his heretical notions to be perfect," pursued Doña Flor. "A more gallant cavalier I never beheld. He eclipsed all who attended him in the procession."

"Even the king?" said Graham.

"Yes, even the king," she rejoined. "The Infanta is most fortunate in obtaining such a husband."

"You speak as if the affair were quite settled," remarked Don Pompeo, gravely. "But I believe the marriage to be as far off as ever, and it will not surprise me if it should not take place at all."

"Impossible! after all the prince has done," cried Casilda. "Were I the Infanta, I *would* have him, in spite of his majesty and the Conde-Duque."

Some laughter followed this remark, but Don Pompeo did not join in it.

"You talk foolishly, Casilda," he said. "State marriages are not like other marriages. Religious differences are at the bottom of the delay. If the prince becomes a convert, all will be settled. But I don't think that event will occur."

"You doubt everything," said Doña Flor. "How long are the court festivities to continue, Don Christobal?"

"Till the prince is weary of them," he replied. "Next week there will be a grand bull-fight in the Plaza Mayor, at which the prince and the Infanta, with the king and queen and all the court, will assist. If you have never

seen a bull-fight, Don Ricardo," he added, turning to Graham, "you will see one in perfection on this occasion. It will be a magnificent affair. There will be splendid bulls and splendid horses."

"Oh! charming! charming!—that will be delightful!" cried both ladies, clapping their hands.

"I am curious to behold the national spectacle," remarked Graham. "You are a skilful torero, I am told, señor," he added to Don Christobal.

"Oh! I have killed some bulls in my time," replied the other. "It is a very exciting sport—nothing like it."

"I wish you could take part in the exhibition, Don Ricardo," observed Casilda.

"If you desire it, I will," he replied, gallantly. "The Duke de Cea has asked me to be his companion in the ring. I have had no practice in such sports, but as I am a tolerably good horseman, and have a quick eye and a strong hand, I fancy I should be a match for a bull."

"With De Cea in the ring with you, you will be in no danger," said Don Christobal.

"Yes, yes—the duke is an admirable picador!" exclaimed Doña Flor, rapturously.

Don Pompeo looked sternly at his wife, but made no remark.

"I adore a bull-fight," said Doña Casilda. "A cavalier never appears to so great advantage in a lady's eyes as when engaged in a contest with the fierce and active animal."

"I am glad I shall have an opportunity of so displaying myself, señora," said Graham. "I would ask permission to wear your colours."

"May I grant it?" she said, turning to Don Christobal.

"No, that is a license I can grant to no man," he replied. "I shall wear your colours myself, Casilda. You may not be aware, señor," he added, turning with constrained courtesy to Graham, "that this lady is contracted to me."

"Yes, I am aware of the engagement," returned Gra-

ham. "And I feel I ought not to have made the request."

Thinking the conversation was taking an awkward turn, and might lead to a quarrel, the Conde de Saldana proposed an adjournment to the house. A significant glance from Doña Casilda warned Graham of the mistake he had committed, and he determined to be more cautious in future.

By his subsequent deportment he endeavoured to set matters right, but it was evident that Don Christobal's jealousy had been aroused. Neither did Doña Casilda's betrothed seem pleased when her father again begged Graham to make the Casa Saldana his home.

With the exception of the misunderstanding which had thus arisen between him and Don Christobal, Graham had reason to be satisfied with his visit. He had received from Casilda's own lips an assurance that she loved him, and, though many difficulties were in the way, he felt confident of ultimate success.

A trifling incident, however, occurred prior to his departure which caused him some uneasiness. While he was crossing a patio, covered with an awning to exclude the sun, he noticed in the upper gallery of the quadrangle a young woman, who was leaning over the railing and regarding him earnestly. Her features, which were strikingly handsome, seemed familiar to Graham, but at first he could not tell where, or under what circumstances, he had previously seen her. All at once it flashed across him that it must be Rose des Bois, the damsel he had met in the robbers' cottage in the Forest of Orléans; and further scrutiny convinced him he was right. Rose's looks plainly showed that she had recognised him, and her large dark eyes followed him as he walked through the patio. Graham wondered how she came there, and her presence was anything but agreeable to him. An instinctive feeling told him she would be in the way, and prove an enemy to his love-affair with Doña Casilda.

The only person with him at the moment when he thus

beheld her was the Conde de Saldana, who with true Spanish politeness insisted upon attending his guest to the door.

"I think I have seen that damsel before," remarked Graham, pointing to Rose. "But, if I am not mistaken, it was near Orléans."

"That is not unlikely," replied the conde. "She has but just arrived from France."

"She must have travelled very quickly," said Graham. "I should not have thought it possible she could get here in so short a time."

"She was brought on by a Spanish family who were travelling from Paris to Madrid, and by whom she was recommended to my daughter," said the conde. "Calsilda has taken an extraordinary fancy to her, and as Doña Engracia, her dueña, is unwell, I have appointed Rose—for so the damsel is named—to attend upon her."

Graham made no remark, though the latter piece of information was far from satisfactory to him, as he felt sure he should not be able to elude Rose's vigilance as easily as he might have done that of Doña Engracia.

But he had now arrived at the outer door, and as he took leave the conde prayed him to consider himself one of the family, and to come whenever he felt disposed, promising him a hearty welcome.

VI.

A MIDNIGHT MEETING

CHARLES had given up all hopes of another interview with the Infanta, and had again lapsed into a state of doubt and despondency, when he was revived by the Duke de Cea, who appeared before him one morning with a radiant countenance, and said,

"At last I have succeeded. Your highness shall see the princess to-night. I cannot tell you where, at this moment, because the meeting has to be arranged by the Countess de Olivarez, who has promised her assistance, but I will come to your chamber at midnight, and conduct you to the place of rendezvous."

Thanking the young duke warmly, Charles promised to be in readiness at the hour appointed. On seeing his chamber that night, he dismissed his attendants, and sat down to read, but he was far too much excited to be able to fix his attention on the volume before him, though it recounted the adventures of the renowned Don Quixote, and he at last laid the marvellous romance aside, and began to pace to and fro within the room. Shortly before midnight the door was softly opened, and De Cea entered the room.

The young duke's countenance showed that all was right, so, without stopping to question him, Charles hastily donned his cloak and hat, and bade him lead on.

"Whither are you taking me, duke?" said the prince, as they descended a private staircase.

"To the patio," replied De Cea. "There your highness will find the Lady Infanta."

Traversing a corridor on the ground floor, they soon reached the patio, which was situated, as already mentioned, at the rear of the prince's quarter of the palace.

This beautiful Arabian court formed part of the ancient Alcazar, and was surrounded by marble arcades. The interior was filled with orange-trees, and in the centre there was a fountain. At that still hour the court was charming. The air was loaded with fragrance, and all was so hushed in repose that the plashing of the fountain in its marble basin could be distinctly heard. One side of the patio was lighted up by the moon, the other buried in gloom.

On entering the court, Charles gazed anxiously down the moonlit arcade, but, seeing no one, he proceeded to the farther side, where two female figures, attired in black, and draped in mantillas, met his view. Both ladies were masked, but Charles entertained no doubt that they were the Infanta and the Countess de Olivarez.

As he hurried towards them, De Cea stood still, while one of the masked dames, instead of waiting for the prince's approach, withdrew to the farther end of the arcade. Charles was thus left alone with the other, and on reaching her he immediately threw himself at her feet, and seizing her hand, pressed it passionately to his lips, imploring her to remove her mask.

Unable to resist his passionate importunities, the Infanta took off her mask, and regarded him for some moments with a tenderness which she did not seek to disguise. There was no necessity to avow her love by words. Her looks proclaimed the state of her feelings.

The rapture of those moments—the certainty he then obtained that his passion was requited—made Charles ample amends for all the anxiety he had endured. Arising from his kneeling posture, but without quitting the hand which the Infanta did not seek to withdraw, he gazed at her long and passionately.

"Oh, Maria!" he cried, at length. "The bliss of this moment would be cheaply purchased by a kingdom. A crown without you to share it with me would be valueless in my eyes. So deeply —so fervently do I love you, that I would rather tarry with you in some lowly

dwelling in Spain than return to my father's palace without you."

"Have a care, prince," she rejoined. "You assert too much. I shall put your love to the test. I do not ask you to make any worldly sacrifice for me. I do not desire you to make further concessions to the king my brother—I love you, Charles Stuart, I love you—I will be a true and loving wife to you—I will make your country my country—your people my people. But before I do this, I require that you conform to the holy faith of Rome."

"Impossible, Maria. You ask the only sacrifice I cannot make," replied Charles, in a sad but resolute tone.

"You do not love me as deeply as you have affirmed," she said, reproachfully. "If you did, you could not hesitate. But I can never wed you, save on this condition."

"You crush all my hopes by the determination, Maria," cried the prince, in a voice of anguish. "And if you persist in it, all chance of our union is over. But the king your brother has made no such condition. He can dispose of your hand as he thinks fit."

"Not so," she replied, firmly. "Philip can prevent my marriage, but he cannot force me into an alliance to which I am opposed. I will withdraw from the world altogether, and immure myself in a convent, rather than endanger my soul."

"You terrify me, Maria," cried Charles; "but I can scarcely believe you seriously contemplate so fatal a step."

"I trust the step will never be necessary," she rejoined. "I still fondly persuade myself that I shall be able to convert you. My confessor, Padre Ambrosio, is a good man—an excellent man—and has your interest at heart. Will you see him?—will you listen to him, if I send him to you?"

"I will do anything you require," replied Charles. "But I announce beforehand that Father Ambrosio will throw away his time in attempting my conversion."

"But for my sake listen to him. I have promised him that you will do so."

"You have promised him—ha?" cried Charles. "Now, tell me frankly, Maria, has not Father Ambrosio charged you to attempt my conversion?"

"I will not deny it. I could not disguise from him what passed between us in the garden of the Casa del Campo, and he has warned me of my danger in marrying a heretic. But he believes that he can convince you of your errors, and feels certain you will embrace our faith."

"One question more, Maria," said Charles. "Is Father Ambrosio aware that you intended to meet me to-night? Nay, I am sure he is," he pursued, after a slight pause. "Did he not prompt you what to say to me? Did he not tell you to make my conversion the indispensable condition of our union? You cannot deny it. Well, you have fulfilled his instructions."

"Would I could assure him that I have made an impression upon you, Charles!" she said.

"Tell him so," he rejoined.

"May I?" she exclaimed, joyfully.

"Certainly; and if he questions you closely—as no doubt he will—add that you have hopes of my assent—for you *have* hopes, I am sure."

"May I say so much as that?" she cried. "I fear my arguments will never prevail with you, but if you will listen to Padre Ambrosio, he cannot fail to convince you. See him—only see him?"

"Willingly, since you desire it," rejoined Charles. "Indeed, I desire to be on good terms with Padre Ambrosio."

"From this moment you may calculate upon his zealous co-operation," said the Infanta. "He will now promote our union as much as he has hitherto opposed it."

The further discourse was here interrupted by the Duke de Cea, who, stepping quickly towards them, said, in a low, warning voice, "Some one approaches!"

At this alarm, Maria instantly resumed her mask.

"Adios, prince," she cried.

"Do not go till you have promised to meet me again, Maria," cried Charles, detaining her.

"I cannot stay. We shall be discovered. Santa Maria! it is too late," she cried, as two cavaliers entered the arcade.

By this time the Countess de Olivarez had joined the party.

"What shall we do, countess?" said the Infanta, in great trepidation.

"Stay where you are, princess. There is nothing to fear. Those intruders will pass on," rejoined the countess, in a low voice.

"By Heaven, it is the king!" said De Cea. "We are lost."

"Madre santissima! my brother!" cried the Infanta. "What will he say to me?"

It was a moment of great perplexity, and even Charles felt himself placed in a position of the utmost embarrassment. No doubt could now be entertained that it was the king, and that the person by whom his majesty was attended was the Conde-Duque.

The only hope was that Philip and Olivarez would pass on. But they did not do so. Both ladies were masked, and Charles had pulled his hat over his brow and muffled his face in his cloak, so that his features could not be distinguished.

"Who have we here?" demanded Philip.

Finding that nothing else could be done, De Cea plucked up his courage, and stepped towards the king.

"Tis I, sire," he said.

"De Cea!" cried Philip.

"Hush, sire! do not betray me," said the duke. "Your majesty is too gallant to interrupt a little love-affair."

"Who is the other cavalier? There can be no reason for concealment on his part," said the king.

"I implore your majesty to excuse my answering the question," said De Cea.

"I must be satisfied," said Philip. "I have strong suspicions. Who is it?"

"Since your majesty compels me to speak, I must own that it is the Duke of Buckingham," replied De Cea.

"Buckingham!" exclaimed Olivarez. "And who are the ladies with him?"

"Ay, who are they?" demanded the king.

"You cannot expect me to reveal their names, sire."

"What! my lord—you refuse to satisfy me?"

"I am bound to do so, sire."

"Then I will have an answer from their own lips," said Philip. "Bid them come to me."

"Nay, I beseech your majesty not to pursue this inquiry further," rejoined De Cea, beginning to be seriously alarmed.

"Heed not what he says, sire," remarked Olivarez, in a low voice. "There is something wrong here."

"Obey my orders, duke," said Philip, authoritatively.

Almost at his wits' end, De Cea returned to the others and told them what the king required. For a moment they appeared confounded, and the Infanta declared she would throw herself at her brother's feet and implore his pardon.

"No, no, we may yet get over the difficulty," said the countess. "Speak to the Conde-Duque, while I address the king. Courage, princess—courage!"

With this the countess tripped towards Philip, and, taking him aside, said:

"I trust myself to your majesty. You will not betray me to my husband."

"Cielo! is it you, countess?" cried Philip, in surprise.

"Not so loud, sire, I entreat of you," she rejoined.

"The lady with me is Doña Flor."

"Enough," returned Philip. "Pray excuse the stupid act I have committed. I will not detain you a moment longer."

Meanwhile, the Infanta approached the Conde-Duque, and drew him aside.

"Your excellency must help me in this strait," she said. "The king will never forgive me if he learns the truth."

"Is it possible it can be the Infanta?" cried Olivarez.

"Do you not recognise my voice?" she rejoined.

"Yes, yes," he answered. "But why are you here, princess, with the Duke of Buckingham?"

"That is not Buckingham, my lord—it is the prince."

"The prince!" exclaimed Olivarez. "Nay, then I cannot hide the matter from his majesty."

"Hold, my lord!" said the Infanta. "This private meeting with the prince has been sanctioned by Padre Ambrosio. You will be satisfied with the result when I tell you that his highness is likely to become a proselyte to the faith of Rome. He has consented to see Padre Ambrosio to-morrow."

"Ah! that is good news indeed," cried Olivarez. "Padre Ambrosio has pursued the best plan to convert the prince. You shall have no interference from me, princess. I will make some excuse to the king." Then, turning to Philip, he added, "Your majesty need not question this lady."

"No; it is sufficient that you have spoken to her," replied the king. "I know who she is."

"Indeed, sire!" exclaimed Olivarez, uneasily.

"Yes, it is Doña Flor," rejoined Philip.

"Very true," said Olivarez, laughing. "He little thinks it is the Infanta. A propos, sire, who is the other lady?"

"Nay, your excellency must excuse me. I am bound to secrecy. He little thinks it is his wife," thought Philip, laughing to himself.

Then, bowing to the two ladies, who deferentially returned his salutation, he quitted the patio with Olivarez.

As soon as they were gone, Charles, who had remained stationary, joined the group.

"Admirably managed!" he cried. "You have extricated yourselves from this difficulty with wonderful skill."

"I can't tell how I got through it," said the Infanta. "I was never so frightened in my life."

"I had most cause for alarm," observed De Cea, laughing. "Had a discovery been made, my head would not have remained long on my shoulders."

"In getting out of one difficulty I have fallen into another," said the countess. "His majesty must have a dreadful opinion of me."

"Don't trouble yourself on that score, dear countess," said the Infanta. "All will be satisfactorily explained hereafter. But I must regain my apartments as soon as possible. Good night, prince," she added to Charles. "Remember your promise to see Padre Ambrosio."

So saying, she hurried away with the countess, moving off in the opposite direction from that taken by the king and his minister.

VII.

IN WHICH ARCHIE READS THE PRINCE A LECTURE.

GENERALLY, about an hour before noon, all the persons composing Charles's suite, would assemble in the great gallery adjoining his apartments, and after amusing themselves there for some time, talking over the court gossip, and retailing such anecdotes as they had picked up, they repaired to the ante-chamber, where they remained until they were admitted to the prince's presence. Most of them were young men, and their principal motive in coming to Madrid being amusement, they had no reason to be dissatisfied. Ever since the prince's arrival there had been an uninterrupted series

of royal festivities, in which of course they had shared. The most unbounded hospitality was displayed towards all Englishmen. They were everywhere welcome. Every house was open to them. The bewitching Madrileñas smiled upon them, and the proudest Castilians unbent towards them. How they requited this consideration we have shown.

On the morning after the midnight meeting of the royal lovers in the patio, described in the previous chapter, the greater part of the English visitants were collected in the grand gallery. Almost all, as we have said, were young, handsome, richly attired, and of distinguished appearance. Silken doublets of various hues, velvet mantles richly embroidered, plumed and jewelled hats, constituted their attire. A more joyous band could not be found. They talked and laughed loudly, shouted to each other, sang, danced, smoked, and practised fencing. One group, which consisted of Lord Andover, Sir Richard Carr, and Sir Robert Goring, were seated at a table on the embrasure of a window playing at cards. Not far from them, surrounded by a circle of laughing spectators, Lord Rochford and Tom Carey were rattling castanets and practising a bolero, which they had seen danced overnight. Farther on there was another ring, in the midst of which were two gay gallants keeping their hands in with a little harmless sword-play. Somewhat removed from the rest were the Earl of Carlisle and Lord Mountjoy conversing with Sir Francis Steward, who was about to return to England; while flitting from group to group, jesting with all, might be seen a grotesque little personage in a motley garb, with a cockcomb on his head, and a bauble in his hand. This was Archie Armstrong.

Seeing Sir Richard Graham enter the gallery, the jester went to meet him.

"Good day, my merry gossip," said Graham. "I have scarce had a word with thee since thy arrival in Madrid. How dost like the city, the court, the king, the queen, and the Infanta?"

"You ask me too many questions in a breath, gossip," replied Archie, "but I will strive to answer them. I like the city well, though it be not so large nor so well built as I expected. But 'tis a fine city nevertheless, and has a gayer air than London. I like the dresses of the Madrileños, and, sooth to say, I like their manners. I like to hear the tinkling of a guitar, and to listen to a serenade at night. And then those adorable, dark-eyed señoras—I am enchanted with them, and so are they with me for that matter. As to the court, I prefer it to Whitehall."

"How so, gossip?" said Graham.

"I like the grandees, with their proud carriage and stately manners," replied the jester. "They really look like nobles. As to his Most Catholic Majesty, I will tell you what I think of him when we get back. I am afraid to speak my mind here. But I will just whisper in your ear that the real king is Olivarez. Whether Philip is fortunate in his choice of a favourite and prime minister, I won't pretend to say, but he is certainly fortunate in his spouse. And now as to the Infanta. Looking at her with the eyes of Babie Charlie, I should discover nothing but what is captivating. But looking at her with my own eyes, I am not so greatly delighted. Beautiful she is, no doubt, but it is not a beauty to my taste, and her excessive coldness of manner may please the prince, but it wouldn't suit me. I have a dark-eyed señora in my eye at this moment whom I should infinitely prefer to her."

"Who has thus taken thy fancy, gossip?"

"Be not jealous when I name her to you. 'Tis Doña Casilda, daughter of the Conde de Saldana."

"Doña Casilda!" exclaimed Graham. "Where hast thou seen her?"

"I saw her yesterday, when she came to the palace with her father," replied the jester. "Think you she could escape my observation?"

"Well, I agree with thee in thy estimate of her beauty," said Graham.

"I knew you would, gossip," rejoined Archie, knowingly. "Between ourselves, I think you have a much better chance of taking back a wife than our illustrious prince."

"I know not that, Archie," said Graham. "In my case there is a rival."

"A rival is easily got rid of by a man of your metal, gossip," rejoined the jester. "But though the prince has no rival—at least, that I know of—he has what is far worse, a cunning minister to deal with, who will not let him have the prize he covets, unless he pays dearly for it. Mark my words, gossip. I have not been many days in this palace, but I have had my eyes and ears open, and I have seen and heard enough to convince me that unless Babie Charlie turns Papist he won't have the Infanta. What is more, all the royal household feel certain he will become a proselyte."

"You think so?" cried Graham.

"I am sure of it," said Archie. "What would my royal gossip say if he knew of his son's danger?"

"Danger!" exclaimed Graham, contemptuously. "You do not for an instant imagine that the prince is likely to yield."

"There is no saying what influence may be brought to bear upon him," said Archie. "In my opinion, it would have been better if he had stayed at home."

"Perhaps it might," returned Graham, thoughtfully. "Well, I am going to present myself to his highness."

"I am with you," said Archie. "I mean to read him a lecture."

With this, they proceeded to the ante-chamber. On entering it, the usher informed them that Padre Ambrosio was with the prince, and that his highness could not be disturbed—a piece of information that astounded Graham, and elicited a shrug from the jester.

Ere long the confessor came forth, and his exulting looks seemed to indicate that his interview with Charles had been perfectly satisfactory to him.

On entering the cabinet, Graham and the jester found

Charles standing near a table in a pensive posture—indeed, he was so preoccupied that he did not notice them, and two or three minutes elapsed before he became aware of their presence. Even when he did perceive them, he did not trouble himself to speak.

“I will rouse him from his reverie,” said Archie. And marching towards the table, he called out in a voice so exactly resembling the broad Scottish accents of his royal master, James, that the prince absolutely started.

“Babie Charlie! Babie Charlie!” said the jester, “I didna expect this from you, my sweet bairn. When I trusted you to gang to Spain to fetch the Infanta, I was sair troubled at heart, as ye ken, but I didna think ye wad disobey my injunctions.”

“How?” exclaimed Charles.

“Hear what I have to say to ye, sir, and dinna interrupt me,” cried Archie. “In trustin’ you to the court of Spain, I knew fu’ weel the dangers awaitin’ you, but I didna expect ye wad voluntarily thrust your neck into the noose. I didna think ye wad give a private audience to a Romish priest, whose sole aim is to bring ye over to his idolatrous faith. I little thought ye wad listen to him, and send him away gleeful and triumphant. But I canna believe he has prevailed wi’ ye—I canna believe ye hae fallen.”

“Peace, sirrah!” cried Charles, sharply.

“Is that the way ye address your auld dad, ye graceless and ungrateful bairn?” said Archie, in a reproachful tone—“bid him haud his tongue when he gies ye guid counsel. If ye shut your eyes, ye are lost. Resist the wiles of these priests, I tell you, and listen to the discourses of the twa devout chaplains I have sent ye, Doctors Man and Wren. Ye will also hear the truth frae my gossip, Archie, who, though he wears a fule’s cap, is a wise and discreet man, and a determined foe to papistry. Listen to Archie, my bairn—listen to Archie!”

“I have listened to him too long,” remarked Charles, unable to repress a smile.

“Not a whit,” said the jester, gravely. “You should

listen to all that Archie has to say. He kens how loth I was to let ye depart—how miserable I have been lest any mischance should befa' ye—how I hae dreaded the blandishments of these Romish priests. Archie can explain my feelings towards you as weel as I could do myself. He will warn you, if necessary. Ah! Babie Charlie, oft and oft have I said to Archie, 'My son had better come back without his bonnie bride than make any bargain wi' the Church of Rome.'

"And what leads thee to imagine that I have made any such bargain, sirrah?" said Charles.

"The exulting grin that lighted up the features of the crafty carl who has just left the cabinet," replied Archie. "He misdoubts not that he has produced an impression upon you."

At this moment the Duke of Buckingham entered the cabinet, magnificently attired as usual, and seated himself without ceremony at the table beside the prince.

"I have just been receiving a lecture, Geordie," said Charles, laughing.

"A lecture!—from whom?" cried the duke.

"Frae me—frae yer auld dad and gossip, Steenie," said Archie, once more mimicking the voice and gestures of James. "I hae spoken to Babie Charlie, and now I hae a word to say to you. Didna ye promise me to take every care of my son? Didna ye engage to guard him frae a' dangers? Ye canna deny it. Aweel! He canna be in worse danger than he is at this moment."

"What means the knave?" cried Buckingham glancing at the prince.

"My meaning will be plain to ye, Steenie, if ye will but listen," said Archie. "Efforts are being made to lure Babie Charlie frae his faith. A Romish priest has just been closeted wi' him, and has gone away wi' the smile of triumph on his lip, thinking he has convinced my son. Is this the way ye fulfil your promise to me, Steenie? Is this the care ye take of my bairn?"

"By my soul!" cried Buckingham, "if there be any truth in this statement, I deserve the knave's reproaches.

Is it possible that your highness has had an interview with a Romish priest?"

"Padre Ambrosio, the Infanta's confessor, has just been with me," replied Charles, gravely, "and we have been discussing points of faith. He is a man of learning and ability, and I listened to him with pleasure. I have no doubt he persuaded himself that he had produced a certain impression upon me. I allowed him to depart with that conviction."

"He must be quickly undeceived," cried Buckingham, rising. "Be that my business."

"Calm yourself, Geordie, and sit down," cried Charles. "I had a motive for thus throwing dust into the confessor's eyes. He can enable me to see the Infanta when I please."

"That is possible," rejoined the duke, "but you will purchase the privilege too dearly. Padre Ambrosio is an agent of the Nuncio. Intelligence will be immediately despatched to the Pope that your highness's conversion is probable, and the dispensation will be delayed in anticipation of that event. Now that you have held out hopes, nothing less will content them. You have undone all we have been labouring to accomplish. But I must try to set it right."

"Be not hasty, Geordie, or you will mar my project."

At this moment an usher entered, and announced his excellency the Conde-Duque M. Olivarez.

"The very person I desired to see," cried Buckingham.

"Do not offend him, Geordie, I conjure you—I command you," cried Charles.

As Olivarez entered, Graham and the jester retired.

VIII.

OF THE ARGUMENTS EMPLOYED BY OLIVAREZ TO INDUCE CHARLES
TO BECOME A CONVERT.

"HE *has* seen Padre Ambrosio," muttered Buckingham, watching the minister as he made a profound obeisance to the prince.

As Olivarez bowed to him, he returned the salutation somewhat haughtily.

"I am glad to find you here, my lord duke," said Olivarez, without noticing the slight, "because I wish you to hear what I have to say to his highness. I have reason to believe," he pursued, turning to Charles, "that since your highness has been in this most Catholic country, and has had an opportunity of witnessing the rites of that faith, a change has taken place in your sentiments, and that at no distant date we may hope to receive you into the pale of our Church. If these expectations should be realised, and your highness should happily be induced to return to the faith of your fathers, it will be a source of the highest gratification to the king my master, and will at once remove all obstacles to your union with the Infanta."

"Were the prince to take such a step, he would never be King of England," said Buckingham. "His subjects would rise in rebellion against him."

"I do not think so," replied Olivarez, "because I believe the Catholic party to be still strong in England. But if there should be a rebellion, Spain will lend him her armies and navies to quell it."

"If the prince can listen calmly to such a proposition, my lord, it is more than I can," cried Buckingham.

"Pardon me, my lord duke," said Olivarez, "I addressed myself to the prince. I beg your highness will not allow any fears of the consequences to deter you from

taking this step. United as they would be under such circumstances, England and Spain might defy the world. It is not only to your spiritual, but to your temporal advantage, that you should embrace the faith of Rome. England is divided into sects, which the want of energy on the part of your royal father is allowing to grow into dangerous importance. You must crush them with an iron arm. You must annihilate puritanism, or it will overthrow the monarchy. You must have but one religion, and that the religion of Rome. You must extirpate heresy by the same means that it has been extirpated here. Thus you will become a far more powerful sovereign than the king your father. Your throne will be secure. Blessed with the Infanta, strictly allied to Spain, I trust your reign will be long and glorious."

"I will weigh what your excellency has said," observed Charles.

"I beseech your highness to do so," replied Olivarez. "And if you desire to confer with any of our churchmen, they shall attend upon you. They would be delighted to assist in so good a work."

"I thank your excellency, but I do not need their aid," replied Charles. "When I have arrived at a decision, I will let you know."

"Heaven enlighten your heart, and enable you to pursue your purpose!" cried Olivarez. "I shall wait your decision with impatience, and so will the king."

"Not a word to his majesty at present, I pray your excellency," said Charles.

"Your highness's request shall be observed," said Olivarez, bowing, and preparing to depart.

"Hold! my lord," cried Buckingham. "I cannot for a moment believe that the prince seriously entertains any design of abandoning the Protestant faith and adopting that of Rome, but be assured, if it should be so, I will most strenuously oppose it."

"I count upon your opposition, my lord duke," rejoined Olivarez; "but I persuade myself I have con-

vinced his highness of the policy of the step, and he will, I trust, adopt it."

"Indulge no such hope, my lord," said Buckingham. "I can prevent him from doing so—and I will."

"Aha! what is this I hear?" cried Olivarez. "Are you the prince's master, my lord duke?"

"I am the representative of his august father," replied Buckingham. "He must listen to my remonstrances."

"That remains to be seen," replied Olivarez. And with a profound bow to Charles he quitted the cabinet.

"What means this, prince?" cried Buckingham, as soon as he was gone. "If you have formed any such fatal resolution—for fatal it would be—I must enjoin, in your royal father's name, your immediate return to England—with or without the Infanta."

"Do not alarm yourself, Geordie," rejoined Charles, laughing. "There is no danger of my turning Papist. This is a mere ruse. I thought you would see through it."

"See through it! Not I!" cried the duke. "You played the dissembler so well, that you completely imposed upon me. But what is your motive for thus deluding Padre Ambrosio and Olivarez?"

"My motive ought to be obvious to you. It is to baffle their designs. Hitherto, as you know, they have secretly opposed my union with the Infanta. Now they will promote it."

"But they will be more bitterly opposed to it than ever, when they find out that they have been duped," said the duke.

"At all events, a temporary advantage will be gained, and that is something," observed Charles.

"Thank Heaven I have had no part in the scheme, for I cannot approve of it," remarked Buckingham.

"You will have to play a very important part in it, Geordie, before I have done," rejoined Charles. "But come with me. I am about to drive to the House of Seven Chimneys. I must see my chaplains, Doctors

Man and Wren, and let them know how I have duped Olivarez."

"If you are going to call on Bristol, I pray your highness to excuse me," said Buckingham.

"Nay, I will take no excuse," said Charles. "I must reconcile your differences with Bristol."

"Reconciliation between us is impossible," said Buckingham. "I hate him too deeply to affect to be on friendly terms with him. However, I am ready to attend your highness."

Charles then quitted the cabinet, and traversing the grand gallery, where the tumult instantly ceased on his appearance, proceeded to the great court. Entering one of the royal carriages with Buckingham, he desired to be driven to the House of Seven Chimneys.

IX.

THE ROYAL BULL-FIGHT IN THE PLAZA MAYOR.

At length the long-looked-for day arrived on which the grand national spectacle of a bull-fight was to be offered by the king to his royal visitor. As the exhibition was to be conducted on a magnificent scale, and as the circus ordinarily devoted to such shows was insufficient to contain a tithe of the persons who desired to witness it, it was resolved to construct an amphitheatre in the Plaza Mayor, which should almost rival the Coliseum at Rome in its enormous size.

The Plaza Mayor, by far the largest square in Madrid, was of very recent construction at the period of our history, having only been completed about four years previously—namely, in 1619—in the reign of Philip III., by Juan Gomez de Mora. To make way for this immense plaza, the architect had to remove

many ancient habitations, the site having been chosen in the most crowded part of the city, though at no great distance from the royal palace—but the result was to give to Madrid one of the largest and most superb squares in Europe. The four façades of the plaza are surrounded by porticos, the lofty and elegant pillars of which support the upper stories of the habitations. The architecture of these houses is uniform and of a noble character, and stately archways open upon the streets by which the plaza is approached.

From the period of its construction to the present time, the Plaza Mayor, so well adapted by its size and situation for such exhibitions, has been the scene of some of the most striking public ceremonials enacted in Madrid. In this vast area, in the presence of the sovereign and the court and of two-thirds of the entire population, which can easily be there congregated, tournaments on the grandest scale have been held, masques, fêtes, and bull-fights have been displayed, while spectacles of a more lugubrious character have also been there performed. In the midst of the Plaza Mayor the scaffold has often been erected and dyed with the noblest blood of Castile, and the fires of the terrible *auto-da-fé* have frequently been lighted. Thousands of victims to the merciless Inquisition have there perished.

The extensive preparations for the spectacle to be presented to the prince had occupied some time. The whole of the plaza was unpaved, and in the centre an immense amphitheatre was constructed, with seats rising by gradations to the height of the lower balconies of the surrounding habitations, and capable of accommodating an incredible number of spectators. Covered with crimson cloth, and otherwise ornamented, these seats presented a very splendid appearance, and were so arranged that each occupant could command a perfect view of the performance. The arena destined for the courses, was deeply sanded, and was surrounded by double barriers, between which ran a circular passage. There were two grand entrances to the arena, and a gate, with folding-

doors painted red, which communicated with the toril, or dens where the bulls were shut up.

The day dawned most auspiciously. The sun shone brightly, the bells rang joyously, martial music was heard, and bands of mounted archers and arquebusiers in their glittering accoutrements were seen proceeding from the palace to the Plaza Mayor, and though it was certain that the heat would be excessive, no one cared for that inconvenience, provided they could obtain a sight of the grand spectacle. Thousands of manolos and manolas in their gayest attire trooped off to the scene of the approaching show. Vehicles of all kinds thronged the streets, and gaily-dressed majos, mounted on Andalusian horses, and having their majas, seated behind them, forced their way through the crowd of foot passengers. Through the different gates countrymen, bestriding gaily-caparisoned mules, rode into the city, each having a carbine or a trabuco at his saddle-bow. From the Calle Mayor, from the Calle de Toledo, from the Calle de Atocha, living streams poured into the Plaza Mayor, so that even at an early hour the square was filled to overflowing.

Towards noon, when every seat in the immense amphitheatre was occupied by cavaliers in velvet mantles of varied hues, or by lovely dames habited on this occasion in honour of the prince in white silk, and draped in white mantillas of the richest lace; when nothing was seen but the fluttering of plumes and the waving of fans; when every balcony of every house in each of the four façades was occupied by spectators; when roofs and chimneys were invaded, and no point or pinnacle commanding a view was neglected—the coup d'œil of the plaza was magnificent in the extreme. More than a hundred thousand spectators were present, and as all the male portion of the crowd was dressed in lively colours, the effect was very striking. All the balconies were decorated—generally with velvets of various hues, arras, or carpets, but in some cases with cloth of gold

and silver—and these decorations added prodigiously to the effect.

The grand ornament of the plaza, however, and that on which the universal gaze rested, was a magnificent gilt scaffold reared over the arches of the Panaderia, and covered with cloth of gold and silver. This scaffold was divided into several partitions, separated from each other by hangings of crimson damask spotted with silver. The central gallery, reserved for the royal family, was covered in front with cloth of gold, embroidered with the royal arms of Castile and Aragon. On either side were hangings of carnation-coloured cloth of Florence woven with gold, and overhead was a canopy formed of crimson cloth of gold of Milan, very gorgeous to behold. The fauteuils and tabourets were covered with cloth of gold and tissue, and the cushions were of the same rich stuff.

The tribune on the right of the royal gallery was assigned to the ambassadors, and the principal seat in it was occupied by the Papal Nuncio. With him were the Earl of Bristol, Sir Walter Aston, and the ambassadors of the Emperor Ferdinand II., of France, Poland, and Venice. In the tribune on the left sat Don Juan de Castilla, the corregidor of Madrid, and the three regidores. On this occasion, besides his usual train of officers, the corregidor was attended by eight pages and four lacqueys in doublets of black satin guarded with black lace, black velvet cloaks embroidered with silver carocols and gandurados, and hats adorned with black and white plumes. Next was a gallery appointed for the members of the different councils—the royal councils of Castile and Aragon sitting in front. Farther on, in the balconies, were stationed the chief grandes and highest dames of the court.

All the important personages to whom we have referred had taken their places in the tribunes, every balcony in each of the façades was thronged, and presented a most gorgeous show, every seat in the amphi-

theatre was occupied, the whole of the vast plaza was encumbered with gentlemen, pages, and lacqueys, clad in the sumptuous liveries of their lords, and by spectators of inferior degree, but in very gay attire, when the first royal carriage arrived at the entrance of the Panaderia. It contained the queen, the Infanta, and the Infantes, Don Carlos and Don Fernando. Her majesty was dressed in ash-coloured silk, richly embroidered, and adorned with plates of gold, and wore a profusion of jewels. As at all public ceremonials, the Infanta appeared in her royal suitor's colours, her dress being of white satin ornamented with pearls. Don Carlos was attired in black velvet, and Don Fernando in purple.

The royal party were received by the Conde de Puebla, attended by a host of pages in liveries of orange-coloured velvet embroidered with silver lace, and were ceremoniously conducted to the gallery appointed for them, at the door of which stood Don Alfonse Eurigues and the Conde de Benavente, with other grandees. As the two royal personages came forward, attended by their train, their appearance was greeted by enthusiastic acclamations from the beholders.

The next person to enter the royal gallery was the Countess de Olivarez, and shortly afterwards a charming background was formed by the *meninos* and *meninas*, who looked like a *parterre* of flowers in their white and carnation-coloured satin dresses.

Scarcely had the queen and the Infanta taken their places, when fanfares of trumpets, which made the whole plaza resound, announced the arrival of the king and his royal guest.

Philip and Charles had ridden from the palace, and were attended by a guard of superbly-equipped Burgundian archers. Arrayed in black velvet, and wearing black plumes in his hat, the king rode a cream-coloured Andalusian courser. Charles was attired in white satin, embroidered with gold, and his hat was adorned with black and white plumes. He rode the barb given him by the Duke de Cea. On their arrival at the Plaza

Mayor they were received by the Conde de Olivarez and the Duke of Buckingham, attended by a large retinue composed of Spanish and English nobles, all on horseback, and were conducted to the arena. As grand master of the horse, the marshalling of the royal fête devolved upon Olivarez, but he had courteously surrendered the post to Buckingham, and contented himself with acting as the duke's assistant.

After saluting the queen and the Infanta, who had advanced to the front of the royal gallery to watch them, the king and the prince then rode slowly round the arena, and as they pursued their course, Philip explained all the arrangements to his guest, pointed out the different gates in the barriers, and showed him the entrance to the toril.

Having made the circuit of the arena, they came to a halt, and took up a position exactly opposite the royal gallery. Charles then looked around, and was astonished at the spectacle that met his gaze. Never had he beheld so vast an assemblage—never had he witnessed such an extraordinary manifestation of enthusiasm. The whole place was in a state of excitement. From every row in the enormous amphitheatre, from every balcony in the plaza, from every window, scarfs, kerchiefs, and hats were waved. "Viva el Principe de Galles!" resounded on all sides.

Long before these demonstrations had subsided, the performers in the spectacle began to arrive.

The first to enter the arena was the Duke de Cea. He was mounted on a strong iron-grey charger, and was habited in black velvet, edged with silver of goldsmith's work. The young duke was accompanied by Sir Richard Graham and Don Antonio Guino, both of whom were mounted on powerful horses, and wore doublets and hose of tawny velvet, embroidered with silver lace, having great tawny plumes in their hats. De Cea was preceded by fifty lacqueys in white and tawny hose, tawny doublets and cloaks, caps of wrought silver, and swords with silver scabbards.

Having made the circuit of the arena, and bent before the occupants of the royal gallery, De Cea and his two friends bowed reverentially to the king and prince, and then took up a position behind them. While the young duke's lacqueys went out, a hundred others entered. The new comers were attired in white cloth, laced with silver, and wore black caps with white plumes. They formed part of the retinue of the Marquis de Velada, who rode into the ring with Don Pedro de Montezuma and the Duke de Maqueda. Having pursued the same course as De Cea and his friends, these personages stationed themselves behind the king and prince.

Next entered fifty lacqueys in white satin, guarded with branches of azure silk and gold. They preceded the Conde de Villamor, who was mounted on a magnificent chesnut horse—the mane and tail of the noble animal being twisted with silver. Villamor was accompanied by Don Gaspar Bonifaz and Don Christobal de Gavina.

These cavaliers having taken up their position, fifty more lacqueys appeared in dark green doublets, embroidered with silver caracols, having black hats and plumes. This troop belonged to Don Geronimo de Medanilla, who was accompanied by the Conde de Cantillana and Don Diego Zurate.

More lacqueys followed in liveries equally gorgeous—more cavaliers made the circuit of the arena, and took up their position with the others—until at last the number of combatants was complete.

The inspection over, Philip and Charles quitted the arena, dismounted at the entrance of the Panaderia, and shortly afterwards appeared in the royal gallery, where Charles was assigned a place between the queen and the Infanta.

No sooner had the king and the prince taken their seats, than trumpets were sounded, and the whole troop of cavaliers, who remained in the ring, formed themselves into two lines, and, marshalled by Buckingham and Olivarez, rode towards the royal tribune, saluted the

king, and then quitting the arena, drew up in an enclosure reserved for them outside the barriers.

Another procession now entered the arena by an opposite gate. At its head rode four alguacils, mounted on strong black horses, and accoutred in black doublets and cloaks, large funnel-topped boots, and broad-leaved sombreros with black plumes. They were followed by a large troop of toreros, chulos, and banderilleros.

All the latter were young men, somewhat short of stature, but remarkably well formed, and their light active figures were displayed to the utmost advantage in gaily-embroidered doublets, fashioned in blue, rose, or green silk, flesh-coloured silk hose worked with silver, and pink satin shoes adorned with large roses. Their long black locks, taken from the brow, were fastened in a knot at the back of the neck and secured by a silken net. A small black montera hat, ornamented with spangles and tinsel, completed their costume. The chulos, whose business it was to irritate and distract the bulls, carried under their arms capas or mantles of various-coloured stuffs. The procession was closed by a sort of hurdle, dragged along by four mules, decorated with crimson tufts and plumes, and having bells attached to their harness. This equipage was destined to remove the carcasses of the horses and bulls killed in the courses.

The procession having paid homage to the king by kneeling before the royal gallery, passed on, and the greater part went out and stationed themselves in the partition between the barriers. A dozen chulos, half as many banderilleros, and a single torero, were left in the ring.

Again the trumpet sounded, and three cavaliers, each armed with a lance, rode into the arena. These were the Duke de Cea, Don Antonio Guino, and Sir Richard Graham. They posted themselves on the right of the toril, which faced the royal gallery, at intervals of twenty yards from each other, the young duke being nearest the toril, and Graham farthest from it.

While these dispositions were made, the vast assem-

blage became perfectly silent. Expectation was so highly raised that scarcely a breath was drawn.

Amid the silence, the alguacils rode towards the tribune occupied by the corregidor, and, baring their heads, besought permission to open the toril.

In response, a large key, ornamented by ribands, was flung to them by Don Juan de Castilla. It was caught in a hat, and delivered to a valet of the ring, who ran with it towards the toril, while the alguacils galloped out of the arena as fast as they could, amid the shouts and jeers of the beholders.

Trumpets were then blown, the red gates of the toril were thrown wide open, and quick as lightning a bull rushed forth. At the moment of his entrance a little flag was planted in his shoulder, bearing the device of the Duke de Cea. He was a splendid animal brought from Andalusia, where the best bulls are bred, and soon gave proof of courage and activity. His colour was a shining black; his horns sharp and crescent-shaped; his eyes fierce and wild in expression. For a moment he seemed bewildered by the shouts that greeted his appearance, and the thousands of faces that met his gaze, but after a short hesitation, during which he bellowed savagely, and lashed his sides with his tail, he precipitated himself on De Cea, who, lance in hand, awaited his attack.

At a bull-fight of the present day, the horse of the picador, generally a wretched animal destined to the knacker if he should survive the conflict, has a thick bandage over the eyes to prevent him from perceiving the onset of the bull. Moreover, the picador's legs are sheathed in iron greaves covered with leather. But at the period of which we write, when nobles and cavaliers were picadors, no such precautions were taken, and as good horses were used in the bull-ring as in the tilt-yard.

Thus De Cea's noble steed, though conscious of his danger, remained motionless until the bull was close upon him, when, obedient to the will of his rider, he

turned slightly aside, and the furious brute, missing his mark, rushed on, not, however, unscathed, for he received the point of De Cea's lance deep in his shoulder. The shaft of the lance was broken by the blow, but another weapon was instantly handed by a chulo to the duke, who expected the bull to renew the attack.

Instead of wheeling round, however, the beast went on, and, again crouching his head, made a dash at Don Antonio Guino. This time better success attended the charge than had done that on the young duke. Shivering the lance with which Don Antonio struck him, the furious brute gored the horse deeply in the chest, rendering the animal unmanageable, and while he was struggling with Don Antonio, the bull returned to the attack, and this time plunging his horns into the horse's body near the girths, lifted him and his rider completely from the ground.

This feat was greatly applauded by the spectators, and cries resounded on all sides of "Bravo toro! buen toro! gentil toro!"

Amid these shouts, Don Antonio disengaged himself from his steed, from whom the blood poured forth in torrents, and vaulted over the barriers. At the same time, the chulos advanced towards the bull and fluttered their mantles before him to distract his attention from the fallen steed, on whom he was still venting his rage. His attention being thus diverted, the bull turned to his new opponents, who, having succeeded in drawing him towards the centre of the ring, took to flight, and made for the barriers.

All escaped but one, who slipped and fell, and his fate seemed certain. A thrill of horror pervaded the assemblage as the bull, who had rushed past him, turned and lowered his blood-stained horns. But deliverance was at hand. Ere the vengeful monster could transfix him, his own side was pierced by the lance of Graham, who had dashed to the assistance of the prostrate chulo. Bellowing savagely, the bull turned upon his new foe, but Graham avoided the attack, and, profiting by the

opportunity, the chulo sprang to his feet and cleared the barrier.

Meanwhile, the bull wheeled round and again assaulted Graham, but he had now met with an antagonist whom it seemed impossible to touch. Rapid as were the monster's movements, frequently and furiously as he charged, he did not once succeed in touching Graham, so admirably did the young man manœuvre his steed.

In this manner the bull was conducted to that part of the arena which was nearest to the royal gallery, when the animal, fatigued by his ineffectual attempts, desisted from further attack, and stood still, staring in angry wonderment at his opponent.

Charmed by the remarkable skill displayed by the young man, the spectators applauded loudly, and a thousand voices called out, "Viva el Caballero Ingles! viva Don Ricardo! viva!"

Apparently indifferent to the bull, Graham bowed in reply to these acclamations. But he had scarcely made the movement, when the bull, who had been stealthily watching him, again made a charge. This time the horns of the brute slightly grazed the side of the horse, who snorted with pain, but remained perfectly under the rider's control.

Thinking the conflict had endured long enough, Graham resolved to put an end to it. With this design, he flung away his lance, and drew his sword. Allowing the bull to make two more charges, he avoided them dexterously, but on the next assault he plunged his rapier up to the hilt between the animal's shoulders.

Pierced to the heart, with the sword still sticking in his body, and blood mingled with foam gushing from his mouth and nostrils, the bull dropped on his knees before his conqueror.

The whole amphitheatre rung with plaudits, and shouts again resounded on every side of "Viva el Caballero Ingles!"

At that moment of triumph, Graham glanced anxiously round, and at last his eye caught that of Doña Casilda.

The trumpets then sounded the morte, and presently afterwards the four gaily-caparisoned mules, with the hurdle attached to them, galloped into the arena, their bells jingling merrily, and bore off the carcase of the bull.

While this took place, De Cea rode up to his friend, and warmly congratulated him on his brilliant achievement.

"You have begun well, amigo," cried the young duke.

"Oh, this is nothing. I hope to do better," rejoined Graham. "We must have another bull."

"You must control your ardour for a while," laughed De Cea. "The next course belongs to the Conde de Villamor. But perhaps he will let us join him. If so, we will have a couple of bulls. Here he comes. I will ask him," he added, as Villamor, accompanied by Don Gaspar Bonifaz and Don Christobal, rode into the arena.

X.

THE SECOND COURSE.

FROM the moment of Graham's entrance into the arena to that when the bull dropped at his feet, he had been anxiously watched by Doña Casilda, who was seated in a balcony of the amphitheatre, on the right of the toril. With her were the Conde de Saldana, Doña Flor, and Don Pompeo. In the same balcony, immediately behind her young mistress, sat Rose, who, being attired in black silk, draped in a mantilla, and provided with a fan, looked like a Spanish doncella. Throughout the course, Rose's dark eyes had been fixed upon Graham, and she followed his every movement

with an interest quite as keen as that felt by Doña Casilda.

With the exception of Don Pompeo, all the party were in raptures at the address displayed by Graham, and the conde was loud in his praises.

"I can scarcely believe this is the first time Don Ricardo has encountered a bull," he said. "He has all the skill and coolness of an experienced picador."

"The Duke de Cea must have taken great pains with him," remarked Doña Flor.

"I think he is quite as skilful as the duke," said Casilda.

"That is not saying much in his praise," rejoined Don Pompeo. "De Cea did nothing in the course we have just witnessed."

"We shall see what he does in the next," observed Doña Flor.

"Is Don Ricardo about to take part in the next course?" asked Casilda, eagerly.

"So it appears," replied Don Pompeo. "He and De Cea seem loth to leave the ring." And he muttered, "May they never quit it with life!"

While this ill wish was breathed, Doña Casilda detached a knot of ribands from her breast, and, giving it to Rose, said, in an under tone,

"Let this be conveyed instantly to Don Ricardo. Say it comes from me."

"The señora shall be obeyed," replied Rose.

And quickly descending to the barriers, she addressed herself to a chulo, who took the breast-knot, and, vaulting into the ring, hastened towards Graham.

Meanwhile, the arena had been prepared for a second course. As soon as the bull had been disposed of, the mules returned with their equipage, and carried off Don Antonio Guino's horse, which by this time was dead. A torero also brought back the sword with which Graham had despatched the bull, and delivered it to its owner. At the same time, all evidences of the recent conflict were carefully obliterated by the varlets of the ring.

On learning from De Cea that he and Graham desired to join in the second course, the Conde de Villamor at once courteously assented, but it being necessary to ask permission of the corregidor, a messenger was despatched to ascertain the pleasure of that important personage; and it was during this interval, and while the five cavaliers were drawn up opposite the corregidor's tribune, that the chulo ran towards Graham, and, holding out the breast knot to him, exclaimed:

"Hist! Señor don Ricardo!—this favour is from Doña Casilda."

"From Doña Casilda! Then it must be for me," cried Don Christobal, snatching the breast-knot from the chulo.

"Nay, señor, I am certain it was meant for the English caballero," cried the chulo. "The doncella told me so."

"Concern yourself no further, friend," rejoined Don Christobal, sternly. "I am Doña Casilda's betrothed."

On this, the chulo retired.

"The favour was unquestionably intended for me, señor," said Graham to Don Christobal. "You would not be uncourteous enough to detain it."

Don Christobal made no reply, but proceeded to fasten the breast-knot on his doublet.

At this juncture, the corregidor, to whom the message had just been delivered, advanced to the front of his tribune, and bowed to the group of cavaliers, to intimate that he assented to their request. The five champions immediately dispersed themselves, each taking up a position close to the inner barrier.

Though burning with indignation, Graham was obliged to constrain himself for the moment, but he promised himself speedy revenge. As he glanced towards the balcony where Casilda was seated, he perceived from her looks that she was aware of what had occurred, and his rage was increased by the smile of triumph that curled Don Christobal's lips.

"He shall not wear that breast-knot long," he thought.

Meantime, the trumpets again sounded, the gates of the toril were thrown open, and a second bull dashed into the arena.

Like his predecessor, he was for a moment blinded by the flood of sunshine that burst upon him, and stopped, bewildered by the shouts and by the presence of so many spectators. He was a powerful-looking beast, dun in colour, with sharp white horns, tipped with black, and bent upwards. His mouth was covered with foam, and his eyes flashed fire.

After gazing round the ring and bellowing furiously, the bull hurled himself on the Conde de Villamor, who stood nearest him on the left. Villamor avoided the charge, and pierced him in the shoulder with his lance, but the wound only served to irritate him, for he returned to the attack with such celerity, that the conde found it impossible to get out of the way, and, before he could draw his sword, the bull was upon him.

Down went horse and man, overthrown by the terrible shock, and for a moment the conde seemed in great danger, as his steed had fallen upon him, and he could not extricate himself.

An immense cry rose from the assemblage, mingled with some shouts of "Bravo toro!"

Luckily for Villamor, the bull expended his fury upon the horse, plunging his horns repeatedly into the prostrate animal, and while the vengeful beast was thus engaged, a troop of chulos came up, and by fluttering their capas, soon succeeded in luring him towards the centre of the ring.

As soon as the bull was gone, some of the assistants leaped over the inner barrier and assisted Villamor to rise. On regaining his feet he called for another horse, but at that very moment his strength deserted him, and but for assistance he must have fallen. While he was being carried out of the arena, the bull caught sight of him, and immediately quitting the chulos, who strove in vain to arrest him, dashed at the party. Scared

by the animal's approach, the men left the conde and fled.

A cry of horror arose from the assemblage, who thought that Villamor was lost. Even the king manifested the greatest anxiety. But swift as was the bull, De Cea was swifter. As the animal, with lowered horns, and vengeance in his flaming eye, was within a yard of Villamor, who was lying prostrate on the ground, the lance of the young duke smote him deeply on the shoulder. The bull then wheeled round and turned his rage on his new assailant, and while he was thus engaged, Villamor was carried safely out of the arena, to the great relief of the beholders.

All eyes were now fixed upon De Cea, who, by executing several rapid voltes and demi-voltes, avoided the furious charges of the bull, and in this manner led the animal to that part of the arena nearest the royal gallery.

At this moment, in obedience to the corregidor, who waved his kerchief from his tribune, the trumpets were sounded, the gates of the toril again flew open, and a third bull came instantly forth, bearing between his shoulders a little flag marked with the device of Don Christobal.

The animal's appearance excited high expectations. In colour he was of a reddish brown, with well-set horns sharp as poniards, eyes that burnt like flaming coals, a curled foretop, and an immense dewlap. Lashing himself with his tail, and pawing the ground, he bellowed fiercely. The roar made his presence known to the bull on the opposite side of the ring, who instantly answered by a similar note of defiance, and the twain would have rushed at each other if they had not been prevented.

Aided by some of the chulos, De Cea kept his bull in check, and held in play as before, while the toro roxo, as he was styled by the spectators, found his course barred by the three picadors. Despising these obstacles, however, he dashed against Don Christobal, who was

nearest to him, and, regardless of the wound he received, went on, and assailed Don Gaspar Bonifaz, from whom he got a second thrust in the shoulder. Then, abandoning his original design of seeking out the other bull, he wheeled round with inconceivable rapidity, and again dashed at Don Gaspar, ripping up the side of the horse, and wounding the cavalier himself in the thigh.

But this was not all. Without a pause in his furious career, he turned his horns upon Don Christobal, and in another moment horse and rider were rolling upon the ground.

Graham saw what had occurred. Had he waited for another moment, the horns of the infuriated monster would have delivered him from his rival. But a nobler impulse swayed him. Without hesitation he charged the bull, whose head was lowered to strike Don Christobal, and smote the savage brute between the shoulders with such force that more than a third of the lance disappeared, while the bull, who had received his death-wound, fell within a foot of the horse he had slain.

Thunders of applause greeted this gallant action. The spectators appeared frenzied with delight. "Viva el Caballero Ingles! Viva Don Ricardo! Viva!" again resounded on all sides. As the hero of the moment glanced towards the balcony, where the mistress of his heart was seated, she waved her kerchief enthusiastically to him, and that was reward enough for his prowess.

Meanwhile, a troop of chulos had flown to Don Christobal's assistance, but before they came up he had extricated himself from his horse. His first business was to proffer thanks to his deliverer, but he did so with an ill grace, and could not conceal his mortification.

"I owe my life to you, Don Ricardo," he said, "and must try to pay off the debt, if I can."

"Give me that breast-knot of ribands, and I shall be satisfied. You can pay it off at once," rejoined Graham.

"We are quits, then," said Don Christobal, detaching the ornament from his doublet, and presenting it to his rival.

Glancing towards the balcony where Casilda was seated, Graham saw she was watching him, and pressing the favour to his lips, he fastened it on his breast.

Just at this moment a torero came up, bearing a small flag which he had just unhooked from the neck of the bull.

"This trophy belongs to you, Señor Don Ricardo," he said to Graham. "Is there any lady present to whom you desire to send it? If so, I will see it conveyed to her."

"I thank you for your courtesy, friend," replied Graham, to whom the torero's features seemed familiar. "The lady to whom I would present it is seated in yonder balcony, on the left of the toril."

"I see," replied the torero, glancing in the direction pointed out. "It is Doña Casilda, daughter of the Conde de Saldana. She is looking towards us, and understands your design. The flag shall be sent to her at once."

He then bowed towards the balcony, so as to intimate his intention to Doña Casilda, and was about to depart, when Graham stopped him.

"Stay, friend," he said. "Methinks we have met before."

"True, señor," replied the torero, bowing; "we *have* met before—in the Somosierra."

"Ha! is it possible?" exclaimed Graham, a light suddenly flashing upon him.

The torero, however, did not tarry for further questioning, but ran to the barriers, where he quickly found a page, who at once mounted to the balcony.

"From Don Ricardo, señora," said the page, as he delivered the trophy to Doña Casilda.

"From Don Christobal you mean," remarked Don Pompeo. "The flag bears his device."

"That may be, señor," replied the page, "but it was the English caballero who killed the bull. The flag, therefore, belongs to him, and he has sent it to the señora."

"I am much beholden to Don Ricardo, and to you for bringing it," said Casilda, smiling with pride and pleasure.

His errand fulfilled, the page bowed and departed.

"You should not have accepted the flag, Casilda," remarked Don Pompeo. "Don Christobal will be offended, and with good reason. Such a mark of attention from Don Ricardo is highly improper. All eyes are upon you, and the incident is sure to be commented upon, and to Don Christobal's disadvantage. I advise you to throw the flag away."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," replied Casilda. "Don Christobal deserves to be mortified for his want of skill. He has allowed a mere novice to eclipse him. But for Don Ricardo, he would have been killed."

"Perhaps you would not have been sorry if he had," remarked Don Pompeo, spitefully.

At this moment a great shout from the spectators announced that De Cea had just despatched the other bull. Doña Flor was enchanted, and applauded enthusiastically, much to her husband's annoyance. But his ill humour was increased when, shortly afterwards, the page reappeared, bringing a bunch of blue and red ribands, taken from the neck of the bull which had just been slain, and presented it to Doña Flor.

"From the Duke de Cea," said the page.

"I thank him for his attention," she replied, with a gracious smile. "I have now got my trophy," she added, turning to Casilda.

"You do not mean to wear it," whispered the other. "Don Pompeo looks as black as thunder."

"If he chooses to make himself ridiculous in public I cannot help it," returned Doña Flor. "I shall not be deterred by his cross looks from wearing the token."

The course being ended, the Duke de Cea and Graham left the ring to other champions. As they rode forth together, they paused for a moment, and bowed gracefully to the balcony, in which Doña Flor and her sister were seated.

The acclamations that attended Graham's departure showed how highly his skill and gallantry were appreciated by the spectators.

XI.

HOW ARCHIE WAS TOSSED BY A BULL.

MEANWHILE, preparations were expeditiously made for another course. The dead bulls and horses were carried off by the mules as before, and the marks of the conflict effaced. The only one of the champions left in the ring who had figured in the last encounter, was Don Christobal. He had been provided with a fresh horse, and seemed eager to efface his late defeat. The three picadors who joined him in the arena were the Marquis de Velada, Don Pedro de Montezuma, and the Duke de Maqueda.

As soon as the champions had posted themselves, the trumpets sounded, and a bull rushed forth, successively assailing Velada and Montezuma, and receiving thrusts from both. In the third assault he was slain by Don Christobal, who thus redeemed his credit and gained the applauses he so eagerly coveted.

Quickly was the carcass removed—quickly came another bull into the arena. But the new comer not evincing an immediate disposition to attack the picadors, he was drawn to the centre of the ring by the chulos, and there his fury was roused to the proper pitch by the banderilleros, who planted their rustling darts in his shoulders.

Among the troop engaged with the bull was one personage who had no previous experience of such performances, but who trusted, nevertheless, to his activity to extricate himself from peril. This was Archie, the court fool. He had so earnestly besought Buckingham to allow

him to enter the arena, that the duke consented, though with considerable reluctance.

Archie's motley garb, which presented a striking contrast to the gay and glittering attire of the chulos, drew immediate attention to him, and the movements of his grotesque little figure were watched with lively curiosity by the spectators, who were much diverted by his appearance and manner. Even the occupants of the royal gallery watched him. Charles had first remarked him, and called the king's attention to him, and some uneasiness was felt for his safety. Archie had been provided with a crimson capa, which he fluttered in the eyes of the bull, and up to a certain time no misadventure befel him. But after the fury of the bull had been thoroughly roused by the banderilleros, matters began to assume a different complexion, and being warned by his companions, Archie thought it prudent to take to his heels. Unluckily, the bull, after dispersing his other tormentors, who also took to flight, turned, and perceiving the flying jester, dashed after him.

It now became a question whether Archie could reach the barrier before his swift and terrible foe could come up with him. So headlong was the dash of the bull that escape seemed barely possible. Charles gave up the jester for lost, and thought how deeply King James would regret him.

However, Archie went on. A few more paces and he would be safe. The barrier was close at hand. The shouts of the spectators, encouraging him to go on, rang in his ears. But above these shouts he heard the bull, who was now close upon him. He made a desperate spring forward, but failed to reach the barrier, and fell.

A universal thrill of horror pervaded the spectators as the bull lowered his head. Nowhere was this feeling experienced in a higher degree than in the royal gallery. The next moment the jester was tossed to a great height in the air, and all who looked on expected, on his descent, to see him transfixed by the sharp-pointed horns waiting to receive him.

But he was not destined to perish thus miserably. Succour arrived at that supreme moment. A capa flung by a dexterous hand over the head of the bull caused him to turn his head, and the movement saved the jester, who alighted on the ground without any material injury, for the bull, in tossing him, had luckily not touched him with his horns. So little, indeed, was he hurt, that before the bull could shake the capa from his head Archie had vaulted over the barrier.

A general shout hailed his escape.

XII.

THE MASKED PICADOR.

ATTENTION was then fixed upon the torero to whom Archie had been indebted for preservation. He was a very handsome young man, short of stature, but remarkably well made, and his symmetrical limbs were displayed to the greatest advantage in his glittering garb. His complexion was dark, and his eyes black and keen, and he looked a model of grace and agility. He was, in fact, the person in whom Graham had just before recognised an acquaintance. It being quite evident that he was fully able to cope with the bull, the Marquis de Velada and Don Pedro, who had ridden to the rescue, held aloof.

As soon as the bull had freed his horns from the capa, and could distinguish his adversary, who was gazing steadily at him at a short distance, he uttered a short angry roar, and prepared for attack. The torero was only armed with a slight rapier, but he was perfectly undismayed. Indeed, he seemed to regard his furious antagonist with contempt. When the bull dashed at him, he stepped nimbly aside, and the enraged animal

passed by, but returned almost instantly, making charge after charge, but without the slightest effect. Charmed with the extraordinary grace displayed by the torero, the spectators applauded loudly. At last, at a sign from the corregidor, the conflict was brought to a close. Pierced to the heart by the keen rapier, the bull dropped at his conqueror's feet. Bowing gracefully to the royal gallery, the torero vaulted over the barrier and disappeared.

"Who is that man?" said Philip to the Conde de Puebla, who was standing behind his chair.

"I know not, sire," replied the conde; "but I will inquire, and inform your majesty."

"I shall be glad to learn his name, that I may reward him," remarked Charles. "He has rendered me a great service in rescuing the unlucky jester. Had Archie perished, my royal father would have been inconsolable."

"I will find him out, and let your highness know," said the Conde de Puebla. And he left the gallery for the purpose.

When he returned shortly afterwards, he said, "I am unable at present to satisfy your majesty's curiosity. The torero has disappeared, and no one can tell who he is."

"Strange! his features seem familiar to me," remarked Charles, thoughtfully.

"Make further inquiries, my lord," said Philip. "We must be satisfied."

At this moment, the attention of the royal party was attracted by a singular occurrence. Two bulls had been introduced into the ring, both remarkably active animals. They were aware of each other's presence, but were kept at different sides of the arena by the chulos and banderilleros, who had divided themselves into two parties.

While pursuing the flying bands of their tormentors, both bulls, as if animated by a kindred spirit, leaped the inner barrier almost simultaneously, alighting in the passage which encircled the arena. In addition to the chulos, who had just gained this place of refuge, there were many

other persons in the passage at the moment, but all these saved themselves by vaulting into the arena, leaving the space clear for the bulls, who rushed against each other with such prodigious force and fury that both were killed by the shock.

This occurrence, strange and unexpected as it was, only momentarily interrupted the proceedings. The carcasses were removed from the passage, and the arena was cleared for another course.

The champions now occupying the ground were Don Geronimo de Medanilla, the Conde de Cantillana, and Don Diego Zurate. With them was a fourth cavalier, who attracted far more curiosity than his companions, from the circumstance of his features being concealed by a black mask. Everybody wondered who he was, but no one could tell. But be he who he might, it was evident he was a consummate horseman. He was mounted on a black Andalusian barb, which, though full of fire and spirit, obeyed his slightest movement, and he sat his steed with remarkable grace. His small but symmetrical person was attired in white silk, lined with azure and embroidered with silver, and he wore white and blue plumes in his hat. Never had a more graceful cavalier been seen in the bull-ring, and from the moment of his appearance he enlisted all female sympathies in his behalf.

"Who is he?—why is he masked?" resounded on all sides.

But, as we have said, no satisfactory answer could be given to the inquiries. He must be known to the marshals of the fête, or he would not have been allowed entrance into the bull-ring. Not only among the general assemblage, but even in the royal gallery, curiosity was excited as to his name and title, for everybody believed him to be a hidalgo.

"Who is that masked picador?" inquired the king of the Conde de Puebla.

"I am unable to satisfy your majesty at this moment," replied the conde, "but the marshals have just

sent word that an explanation will be given at the conclusion of the course."

"Enough. We will wait till then," replied Philip.

The four picadors having posted themselves, the trumpets sounded, and a bull rushed forth from the toril, singling out Don Geronimo, by whom he was killed. Another bull was then let loose, and another after him. Both these were slain on opposite sides of the arena, and nearly at the same moment—the first by the Conde de Cantillana, and the other by Don Diego Zurate. Don Diego had a narrow escape. The horns of the bull with whom he was engaged, and whom he had smitten on the foretop with his lance, struck the troussequin at the hinder bow of his high Moorish saddle, splitting the wood into shivers, but luckily doing him no injury. A better directed stroke, however, was fatal to the steed, but Don Diego, though dismounted, avenged himself upon his foe.

Hitherto the masked picador had taken little part in the conflict. All he had done was to prick one of the bulls with his lance, as the animal passed him, but he had not stirred from his post. His quietude was so marked that some of the spectators, who on his appearance had augured great things of him, set him down as a fainéant cavalier. But others, who judged him more accurately, felt sure he was only biding his time. And so it proved

While the dead bulls and horses were removed, all the picadors, with one exception, quitted the arena, and the chulos and banderilleros went out. The sole occupant of the ring was now the masked cavalier, and it being seen from these arrangements that he was determined to have no assistance, the resolve at once restored him to the good opinion of the spectators.

As the trumpets sounded he careered round the arena, and tranquilly continued his course even when the bull issued from the toril. A more savage-looking monster could not have been selected. Not one of his predecessors had presented an appearance so formidable. His

eyes seemed on flame, and his roar shook the arena. As he remained pawing the ground, bellowing and lashing his sides, he was a terrible picture. But the cavalier seemed not to heed him, but careered gaily on.

The bull allowed him to make half the circuit of the arena, and then dashed in pursuit. The cavalier had now got the opportunity he desired of displaying the marvellous qualities of his steed. With the greatest apparent ease he eluded every attack of the bull, led him round the ring, suddenly turning when too closely pressed, and in this manner drew him to the centre of the arena, where he compelled him, by his own active movements, to go through an extraordinary series of performances such as no previous bull had exhibited, and which elicited plaudits from all parts of the amphitheatre.

Despite all his efforts, the bull was unable to touch either horse or rider, though he himself received repeated thrusts on either shoulder. At last, the savage nature of the animal seemed subdued. Declining to continue the contest, he quitted his opponent, and trotted off to the farther part of the ring, bedewing the sand with gore. Contrary to expectation, the cavalier did not follow him, but called for another bull. In response to the demand the trumpets sounded, and the toril sent forth another combatant. The sight of the new comer reawakened the fury of the dejected bull, and seemed at once to restore his strength and activity.

Answering the roar of defiance, which he supposed to be addressed to him, he prepared for a new conflict. But it was no part of the cavalier's design that the bulls should engage each other. His aim was to draw their joint attack on himself, and in this he completely succeeded, to the infinite surprise and admiration of the beholders, who had never witnessed such a spectacle before, and who rewarded his prowess with thunders of applause. It seemed a miracle that he could escape destruction from two such active and fierce antagonists, and more than once the spectators gave him up for lost, and thought he was struck. But owing to his address, and the mar-

vellous quickness of his steed, he was never even touched. So hair-breadth were his escapes, that many superstitious persons thought he must possess a charm. The bulls might have thought so too, if they could have reasoned, for he seemed to disappear as they dashed at him. So rapid were his movements, that the closest watchers could scarcely follow them. At one moment the bulls and cavalier seemed heaped together; the next, they were apart. It was an extraordinary sight, and calculated to excite the spectators to the highest pitch. "Bravo! bravo! Viva la Mascara!" resounded on all sides. It was impossible such strife could be of long duration, but how the conflict was to be terminated without mishap to the cavalier, none could conjecture.

The encounter took place in the very centre of the arena, and was confined to this spot while it lasted. A small circle might have been drawn round the combatants, and this seemed to grow narrower and narrower, until one of the bulls suddenly dropped, pierced to the heart by the lance of the horseman. The other bull did not survive his comrade many seconds, but fell in his turn with a rapier planted between his shoulders. This double victory, achieved with such apparent ease, astounded the beholders, and a perfect hurricane of applause arose. The cavalier, who, as well as his steed, was perfectly uninjured, remained motionless between the carcasses of his prostrate foes.

"Unmask! unmask!" cried a thousand voices.

The cavalier complied, flung his mask to the ground, and disclosed the features of a very handsome young man of swarthy complexion.

When the curiosity of the spectators was thus gratified, there was a strange murmur among the crowd, and various exclamations were heard.

At last these confused sounds took a distinct shape, and several voices called out:

"'Tis El Cortejo!"

It is impossible to describe the effect produced upon the assemblage by this announcement. A storm of dis-

cordant noises arose, but applause soon predominated. Amid all this disturbance, the object of it remained stationary. But he glanced anxiously towards the royal gallery, and as it was evident that he expected some decision thence, all eyes were turned in the same direction. It could then be distinctly perceived that Charles was addressing the king, and it was also quite apparent, from the looks of his majesty, which were ever and anon directed quickly towards El Cortejo, that he formed the subject of the prince's address.

The observers augured well from the king's manner. Little doubt could be entertained that he had assented to the prince's proposition, whatever it might be, and that this related to El Cortejo was equally clear. The profound interest felt in what was going on had calmed down the excitement of the spectators, and a universal silence prevailed.

Meantime, the corregidor had quitted his tribune, and was soon afterwards seen to enter the royal gallery, when he was called forward by the king.

After a short discussion, during which evident reference was made to the solitary occupant of the arena, who composedly awaited his sentence, a sheet of paper and a pen were handed to his majesty, who, without quitting his seat, wrote a few lines and signed them. This done, he gave the order to Charles, who likewise signed it. The corregidor received the document from the prince, and making a profound obeisance, quitted the royal gallery.

When this matter had been disposed of, the king and the prince entered into explanations with the queen and the Infanta, and the smiling countenances of the party left no doubt as to the decision arrived at. Nevertheless, no one ventured, even by an exclamation, to anticipate the royal decree.

The assemblage, however, was not held long in suspense. Amid loud fanfares of trumpets the corregidor rode into the arena, accompanied by the Duke of Buckingham and the Conde de Olivarez, both of whom were

on horseback, and followed by an officer in the royal livery, mounted on a magnificently caparisoned charger. Having advanced to within a short distance of El Cortejo, the corregidor and those with him halted, and the trumpets ceasing their clangour at the same moment, the officer in a loud voice, distinctly heard by the whole assemblage, made the following proclamation :

“Be it known to all present, that his Most Serene Highness the Prince of Wales, in exercise of the power granted to him by our sovereign lord and master the king, has been graciously pleased to confer a full and free pardon upon the person known as *El Cortejo*, now before you.”

Here the officer was interrupted by an irrepressible outburst of acclamations, and shouts resounded of “Dios guarde al Rey ! Miva el nobil Principe de Galles. Viva ! viva !”

Placing his hand upon his breast, and with a look expressive of the deepest gratitude, El Cortejo bowed towards the royal gallery, inclining himself twice to the saddle-bow.

While this took place, the torero, whom Graham had recognised, entered the arena, and stationed himself near El Cortejo, but his presence was almost unnoticed, until attention was called to him by the officer, who, as soon as silence was restored, thus proceeded :

“His Most Serene Highness the Prince has also been graciously pleased to pardon Don Gonzalez de Mont-alban, lately known as Lieutenant Roque, and who is now before you.”

Hereupon the torero, whom we must henceforth recognise as Don Gonzalez, stepped forward, and bowed twice profoundly to the royal gallery, in token of his gratitude.

A hundred voices then cried out, “Who is El Cortejo ?”

“Ay, who is he ?” added a hundred others.

“Be silent, and you shall learn,” said the corregidor,

in a voice that dominated all the others, and called immediate attention to the speaker, "Don Flores de Cuenca," he continued, addressing El Cortejo, "be pleased to come forward."

Thus enjoined, El Cortejo placed his hat on his head, to intimate that he was a grandee, and pushed his steed towards him.

"Don Flores," pursued the corregidor, "a full pardon having been accorded you by his Highness the Prince of Wales, his majesty, out of his infinite goodness and leniency, and in consideration of your youth and of extenuating circumstances that have been represented to him, is willing to forget your offences and delinquencies, and in the hope and belief of your amendment, he restores to you your title of Conde de Valverde, together with your forfeited estates. Here is the warrant," he added, delivering to him the paper signed by the king.

"I humbly thank his majesty and the prince," replied Valverde, in tones of deep emotion. "My future career shall prove me not unworthy of their goodness. If I live, I will redeem the errors of my youth."

An immense shout showed the sympathy of the spectators.

"Accept my congratulations, count," said Buckingham, offering him his hand, which the other gratefully took; "when we first met, I had no suspicion of your real rank."

"There I had the advantage of your grace," replied Valverde, "for I ascertained your rank and that of the illustrious personage with you. I owe my restoration to you. Had it not been for the opportunity you have afforded me of appearing before his majesty and the prince, I should not have received a pardon, or regained my title and estates. Be assured of my eternal gratitude."

"You give me more thanks than are my due, marquis," said Buckingham. "You are more indebted to the Conde de Gondomar than to me. He acquainted

the prince and myself with your real history, and it was from what he said of you that I determined to give you a chance of retrieving your tarnished character."

"You will have no cause to regret what you have done, my lord duke," said Valverde. "From this moment I am an altered man."

"You shall not want an opportunity of distinction, since you seek it, count," said Olivarez.

"That is all I desire," cried Valverde. "If your excellency will send me and Don Gonzales de Montalban to Mexico, we will not return till we have won renown."

"You shall have your wish," replied Olivarez. "You shall start to-morrow."

As Valverde bowed his thanks the trumpets sounded, and the party rode out of the arena.

With the strange occurrence just narrated, which excited the assemblage in an extraordinary manner, all interest in the bull-fight seemed to cease, and it would have been well if the spectacle could then have terminated, for only a languid interest was felt in what followed. There were more courses, but they only seemed like a repetition of those that had preceded them, and there was no achievement in any degree comparable to that of the Marquis de Valverde.

The fête was terminated by a grand procession of all the combatants, who marched round the arena, and saluted the royal gallery as they passed before it. Graham was much applauded, but the loudest and longest cheers were given to the Conde de Valverde, who was adjudged the hero of the day.

End of the Fourth Book.

BOOK V.—EL BUEN RETIRO.

I.

HOW THE NUNCIO STROVE TO CONVERT CHARLES.

NEARLY six months had elapsed since the arrival of Charles and Buckingham in Madrid, and not only was the object of the expedition unattained, but the prince and his favourite were less hopeful of its accomplishment than they had been at first. The prince's ardour had not been cooled by the delay, but he continued as passionately attached to the Infanta as ever. Neither had anything occurred to make him doubt the sincerity of the king's intentions towards him. Philip, as we have already stated, had conceived a real regard for his expected brother-in-law, and was quite as anxious for the completion of the match as Charles himself; but Olivarez was determined it never should take place unless Charles became a proselyte. And he did not despair of such a result, though Charles, when closely pressed, always avoided coming to a decision.

At last, the Papal Nuncio undertook to bring the prince to reason. He sought an interview with Charles, and told him he came to express the lively satisfaction felt by the Pope at the disposition evinced by his highness to enter into the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church.

"I am enjoined to read this letter to you, prince," he added, producing a despatch. "It is written by his Holiness, with his own hand. 'We have commanded,' he says, 'to make continually most humble prayers to the Father of Light, that he would be pleased to put the Prince of Wales, as a fair flower of Christendom, and the only hope of Great Britain, in possession of that most noble heritage, which his ancestors have purchased

for him, to defend the authority of the Sovereign High Priest, and to fight against the monsters of Heresy.' In these prayers," pursued the Nuncio, "I most devoutly join, and I earnestly exhort your highness, as well for your temporal prosperity as for your spiritual weal, to conform to the wishes of the Sovereign Pontiff. If your highness will solemnly promise to renounce your errors and embrace the Roman Catholic faith, and will also engage to use your utmost endeavours to bring over the court and kingdom of England to that persuasion, as the representative of his Holiness, I am able to inform you that the dispensation to the match shall no longer be withheld, the hand of the Infanta and her immense dowry shall be ensured to you, and the support of Spain, under any difficulties that may arise, shall be guaranteed. In making this offer, I speak not only for the Sovereign Pontiff, whose envoy and representative I am, but for his most Catholic Majesty Philip IV. It is now for your highness to decide. Prudence and policy alike dictate the course you ought to take. You love the Infanta Maria, who is a princess in all respects worthy of you. But there can be no real union where the creeds of husband and wife are opposed. Misery and aversion must spring from such a match. What must the Infanta's feelings be if she were wedded to one whom she believes doomed to perdition? I pray your highness to reflect upon this point. The more dearly she loves you—and she *does* love you dearly, I know—the deeper would be her solicitude."

"I have thought of this," observed Charles, gravely, "and I am aware that the consideration has been impressed upon the Infanta by Padre Ambrosio, but I conclude that this obstacle would be removed by the dispensation."

"The dispensation would only apply to the Infanta, and would have no efficacy in regard to your highness," replied the Nuncio. "To say that your union could possibly be happy if you continue in heresy, would be to deceive you. Better abandon the match altogether than

persist in it, if you persist in error. Such is my opinion—such is the opinion of his Holiness.”

“But his Holiness has not refused the dispensation,” remarked Charles.

“True; but he cannot overcome his reluctance to grant it,” said the Nuncio, “and the cause of his hesitation must be evident. He has the welfare of his religion at heart. He desires to regard your highness as a friend, but at present he can only look upon you as an enemy. You have it in your power, by a word, to change his sentiments—to obtain all you seek—and secure felicity here and hereafter.”

“Even if I were disposed to accede to the proposition, I could not do so without consulting the king my father,” replied Charles.

“The king your father is blinded by heresy, and cannot see the truth,” said the Nuncio. “It is not needful to consult him. His Holiness will be a father to you—the best of fathers, because he will preserve your soul. Oh! my son,” he added, rising, and speaking with almost apostolical fervour, “hesitate not to throw yourself into our arms! We will receive you as the prodigal was received by his father. We will evoke Heaven’s blessings upon you—blessings that will be denied if you continue in heresy and sin. We will make ready the bride—who, otherwise, will never be yours—and prepare the marriage feast. We will establish you firmly in your kingdom, and protect you against all enemies. Be ours, and all is won!”

“I must have further time for reflection,” said Charles.

“Hesitation at such a moment is worse than weakness, it is sinful,” rejoined the Nuncio. “Be not swayed by the advice of evil counsellors. Listen to those who have your real welfare at heart, and who are clothed with wisdom and authority. As Heaven’s vicegerent, whom I represent, I promise you happiness, the bride you have chosen, and a kingdom here and hereafter. Can you hesitate?”

"I must—I must," said Charles.

"Let me implore you not to reject my offer, my dear son," said the Nuncio. "Let me go forth and say to the king, who loves you as a brother, that it is done—that your conversion is completed—and I shall fill his heart with gladness. Let me tell the Infanta that every obstacle to her union with you is removed, and all her anxiety will disappear. Let me inform his Holiness that his lost son has returned, and there will be a jubilation at Rome. Let me announce to this faithful people that their hopes have been crowned with success, and songs of rejoicing will be heard throughout the land. Shall I go forth and do this?"

"No," replied Charles. "I am not prepared to change my faith."

"Have my arguments failed to convince your highness?" demanded the Nuncio, with a look of disappointment.

"I acknowledge the force of all you have said," rejoined Charles. "But I cannot now decide."

"Do not let the propitious moment pass, or it may never return," said the Nuncio, somewhat sternly. "Your heart is now softened, but it may become callous. You now see clearly, but your sight may be darkened. You have an evil councillor, prince, who thwarts your good intentions. His pride and presumption are adverse to your best interests. Shake off his pernicious influence. He is utterly unworthy of the favour you bestow upon him. I know that the Duke of Buckingham is violently opposed to your meditated faith—but set him at nought, and, if need be, dismiss him."

Just as the words were uttered the door opened, and Buckingham stood before them.

"Methought I heard my name pronounced," he said, bowing in a supercilious manner to the Nuncio, who coldly returned his salutation.

"You were not deceived, my lord duke," rejoined the Nuncio. "Your name was upon my lips at the moment, and I hope you heard what I said of you."

"So you have not numbered me among the Pope's adherents, I shall be perfectly content," retorted Buckingham.

"His Holiness would rather have you as an enemy than an ally, for you injure every cause you desire to serve," rejoined the Nuncio, sternly. "I have warned his highness the prince against your baneful counsels, and I repeat the warning in your presence. I have urged him to dismiss you——"

"You have dared to do this?" cried Buckingham, transported with sudden fury.

"I have dared to do it, my lord," rejoined the Nuncio, in a taunting tone, calculated to exasperate Buckingham still further, "and I will add, that no step that could be taken by his highness would be more gratifying to the king and his court."

"You presume too much on your sacred office!" exclaimed Buckingham, whose rage had become uncontrollable.

"Calm yourself, my lord," interposed Charles.

"Nay, let him go on," said the Nuncio. "I am glad he should display himself in his true colours. If the duke will venture to comport himself thus towards me, the representative of the Sovereign Pontiff, what treatment could the Infanta expect from him! I have warned your highness, it will be my duty also to warn his majesty against the danger which his sister will incur."

"You fear me, and seek to get rid of me," cried Buckingham, "but you will fail in your design."

"No, my lord, it is the prince who fears you, not I," rejoined the Nuncio, with calm sternness; "but I trust he will shake off the yoke to which he has too long submitted."

With an obeisance to Charles, but without noticing Buckingham, he then quitted the cabinet.

"What have you done?" cried Charles, as soon as the Nuncio was gone. "You have destroyed all my plans by your intemperate conduct."

"Better it should be thus!—better the match should be broken off—than your highness should be subjugated by this Papal envoy. We have been scandalously treated. Let us depart at once."

"You may go, Steenie, since you are bent upon leaving, but I shall stay," said Charles.

"What! remain without me!" cried Buckingham, in amazement.

"Most certainly," rejoined Charles, seating himself quietly. "I have no intention whatever of going without the Infanta. I love her and mean to make her mine, whatever time or trouble it may cost to accomplish my purpose."

"Well, since your highness is resolved to stay, I must needs stay too," rejoined Buckingham.

"But if you *do* stay, you must be upon your good behaviour, Steenie," said Charles. "You have contrived to offend all the court, and now you have made an enemy of the Nuncio."

"The king your father will approve of what I have done," said Buckingham.

"Not when he hears my version of the story, and learns my design, which you have all but defeated," said the prince. "Unless you will promise to put due constraint upon yourself, I must order your departure."

"Order my departure!" exclaimed Buckingham, in extremity of surprise. "By Heaven! I begin to believe that these wily priests have produced some effect upon you."

"They have taught me dissimulation, which it seems impossible that you can practise, Steenie."

"No, thank Heaven! I cannot," cried Buckingham. "I must speak out."

"Therefore you are better away," said Charles; "and I advise you to make preparations for immediate departure."

"Nothing will give me more satisfaction, provided your highness will accompany me."

"I remain," said Charles, firmly.

"Then so do I," cried Buckingham.

At this moment an usher announced the Earl of Bristol and the Conde de Gondomar.

Buckingham cordially saluted the Spanish minister, but scarcely deigned to notice Bristol.

"I am sent by his majesty," said Gondomar, bowing profoundly to Charles, "to entreat your highness's attendance at a meeting of the state council to-morrow."

"And mine also, I presume, count?" remarked Buckingham.

Gondomar was evidently embarrassed by the question, and hesitated to reply.

"What am I to understand by your silence, count?" demanded Buckingham.

"Simply that you are not invited," remarked Bristol.

"Ha! then the meeting can be of no importance," cried Buckingham.

"The Conde de Gondomar will tell your grace differently," rejoined Bristol.

"You will judge of its importance when I state that certain articles proposed to be added to the marriage-treaty will be discussed," said Gondomar.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Buckingham. "Are you invited, my lord?" he added, turning sharply to Bristol.

"I am invited," replied the other. "And so is Sir Walter Aston."

"Then either I shall be present at the conference, or the prince will not attend it," said Buckingham.

"What has happened, count?" said Charles to Gondomar.

"Speak out, count," said Buckingham, seeing that Gondomar hesitated. "Fear not to offend me."

"To be plain, then, your grace has incurred the king's displeasure," returned Gondomar. "Some words that have passed between you and the Nuncio have been repeated to his majesty, and have excited his anger."

"I am sorry for it," said Charles, with a look of

annoyance. "But I have but one course to take. A slight to the Duke of Buckingham is a slight to me. I cannot attend the meeting without his grace."

"I will convey your highness's answer to his majesty," said Gondomar.

"Beseech your highness to consider well before you take this step," said Bristol. "It will lead to unpleasant consequences."

"It can only lead to a postponement of the meeting," said Buckingham. "Deliver the message, count."

"No," rejoined Gondomar, after a moment's reflection. "I will rather take upon myself the responsibility of inviting your grace. Come with the prince to the meeting. If you will adopt a conciliatory tone, all may be arranged."

"You hear, Steenie," said Charles; "it is on this understanding that I agree to take you."

Shortly afterwards Gondomar and Bristol departed, leaving Charles and his favourite alone together.

II.

IN WHAT WAY BUCKINGHAM WAS HUMILIATED BY OLIVAREZ.

NEXT day, at the hour appointed, Charles, attended by Buckingham and the two ambassadors, repaired to the council-chamber.

Philip had not yet arrived, but the members of the council—all nobles of the highest rank—with the Conde de Olivarez, had assembled. With the exception of the Conde de Gondomar, they all manifested great surprise on seeing Buckingham enter with the prince, and the Conde-Duque received him with constrained courtesy. Buckingham, however, did not manifest the slightest

embarrassment at the reception accorded him, but comforted himself with his customary arrogance.

Ere many minutes the king made his appearance, and after saluting Charles with his wonted cordiality, turned to Buckingham, whose obeisance he had not deigned to notice, and said, coldly :

"I did not expect to find your grace here."

"My presence appeared indispensable, sire," rejoined Buckingham, "as I understood that certain new articles connected with the marriage-treaty were to be discussed."

"I could not have attended without the duke, sire," said Charles.

"I should have thought your highness might have fully confided in the wisdom and experience of the Earl of Bristol," said Philip, scarcely able to conceal his displeasure. "Since the Duke of Buckingham has taken part in these consultations, frequent disputes and interruptions have occurred, which I hoped might be avoided on the present occasion."

"Sire," said Buckingham, "I trust I shall not offend your majesty if I say that I have a right to be present at these councils."

"Ha! since your grace takes that tone," said Philip, sharply, "I must inquire by what title you claim to be admitted to the meetings?"

"I claim it, sire, as the guardian and adviser of his highness the Prince of Wales," replied Buckingham, proudly, "who has been entrusted to me by his royal father. I claim it also as first minister of the English cabinet, without whose full approval this marriage-treaty cannot be concluded. And let me state at once, in order to save time and prevent disputes, which I dislike as much as your majesty, that I object to add any new articles to the treaty, and, on the prince's part, decline to discuss them. The treaty must be taken as it stands. If additions are constantly to be made to it, it can never be completed."

"Hold, my lord duke! you proceed too fast," inter-

posed Olivarez. "We cannot submit to dictation, especially from one who has no right to a seat in our councils. Had the Earl of Bristol objected to these articles, we should have listened to him with respect, but you have no title whatever to a hearing. If you have a commission from his Majesty King James, produce it. If you have credentials from the English council, lay them before us. But if you have neither commission nor credentials, be silent."

"Why was not this demand made before, my lord?" said Buckingham. "I have attended many councils without exception being taken to my presence."

"Consideration for his highness the prince has induced us thus far to tolerate your interference, my lord duke," rejoined Olivarez; "but our patience is now exhausted. In the Earl of Bristol and Sir Walter Aston his highness has able and judicious counsellors, in whom he may confide. He can dispense with your grace."

"Then my place is no longer here," said Buckingham, making a movement to depart, and glancing at the prince as if he expected him to withdraw likewise.

But Charles took no notice of the signal.

"A moment, my lord duke," said Philip, in a tone that recalled the haughty favourite to his senses, and made him sensible of his indiscretion; "a word before you quit our presence—never to re-enter it. Your appearance at our councils has been irregular and unwarranted, and we have brooked language from you to which we are wholly unaccustomed, but we have borne it out of love to the prince. Now, mark well what I say. You yourself are the main hindrance to the fulfilment of the proposed alliance between the Infanta and the Prince of Wales. Even if every other obstacle were removed, and all we could desire agreed to, the position you occupy in regard to his highness would present an insurmountable difficulty."

"How so, sire?" demanded Buckingham.

"Your influence over the prince would be prejudicial

to my sister," replied Philip. "I cannot expose her to the risk."

"We entirely approve of your majesty's determination," said the whole of the council, with the exception of Gondomar.

"Sire," exclaimed Buckingham, "I know not why your majesty has conceived this ill opinion of me, nor can I do more than conjecture who has poisoned your mind, but this I know, that the Infanta—should the prince be fortunate enough to obtain her hand—will not have a servant more faithful and devoted than myself. Thus much I dare avouch, and I will maintain it with my life, that not one of your grandees—not even the Conde-Duque—could serve her more faithfully than I would. The prince, who knows my sentiments, will confirm what I say. In retiring from your councils, in which, it appears, I have improperly intruded, I must entreat your majesty's forgiveness, and the forgiveness of these noble lords, for any hasty expressions I have used. I should indeed regret it, if I could be supposed wanting in due respect to your majesty, or in consideration to them."

"Sire," said Charles, rising, and speaking with great dignity, "it would be grievous at this juncture, when there is every prospect of the negotiation being speedily concluded, that an interruption should occur. I am certain that his grace of Buckingham, as indeed he has assured your majesty, is sensible that he has been far too hasty, and that he will not so offend again, if he be permitted to occupy a place in the councils. As to the apprehension which your majesty has expressed in regard to the Infanta, I can without hesitation declare it to be groundless. The Duke of Buckingham would be utterly unworthy of the favour he enjoys from the king my father—he would be utterly unworthy of my favour, if he could be other than a devoted servant of the Infanta. Unhappily, in arranging this treaty, religious questions have been chiefly discussed, and these

discussions have not always been conducted, on the duke's part, with befitting temper, but I trust all difficulties may now be reconciled, so that no further disputes can arise. We will make every concession possible, and your majesty will not ask more than we can fairly yield."

"I trust we may come to an entire agreement, prince," said the king, with a certain significance. "The Duke of Buckingham must now be convinced that the violent opposition he has hitherto offered is injudicious and injurious; and in the persuasion that he will henceforward adopt a different course, we will overlook what has passed, and waive the objections that have been raised to his remaining in the council."

At this intimation of his majesty's pleasure, the whole of the council arose and bowed in assent. Buckingham threw himself on his knee before the king, and while kissing the hand graciously extended to him, protested unalterable devotion to his majesty and the Infanta.

As he arose and took the seat he had heretofore occupied at the council-table, and which was on the right of Charles, Olivarez observed, in a low tone to the king, "Your majesty has gained your point. He will no longer oppose the prince's conversion."

"I think not," replied Philip, in the same tone.

If they could have seen into Buckingham's heart, they would have thought otherwise. At that very moment he was meditating revenge for the humiliation he had undergone.

"I will break in pieces the fabric I have put together with so much trouble," he mentally ejaculated. "The match shall never take place."

III.

AN EVIL OMEN.

WELL knowing that any attempt to induce the prince suddenly to break off the match would be vain, Buckingham carefully concealed his design, and feigned to be as well disposed towards the alliance as ever.

If Charles's mind had been at ease, and if he had been allowed a certain intercourse with the Infanta, his prolonged stay at Madrid would have been delightful to him. But the uncertainty in which he was kept, the dissimulation he was compelled to practise, and the arts that were used to ensnare him, interfered with his enjoyment. The grand festivities which had celebrated his arrival had long since ceased, but everything that regal hospitality could devise was done to render his residence at the palace agreeable.

One circumstance, trifling enough in itself, confirmed him in his opinion, that whatever difficulties he might encounter, he should eventually succeed in the object of his expedition.

It may be remembered, that on the morning after his arrival a snow-white dove alighted at the window of his chamber in the House of Seven Chimneys. Singular to relate, when he took up his abode at the royal palace, the dove followed him thither, constantly appearing each morning at the same hour, and if the window was open, as was generally the case, it entered the room and flew towards the prince's couch. So fond did he become of his little visitor, that if it had failed to appear he would have been miserable. The dove fed out of his hand, and allowed him to caress it.

Charles could not fail to mention the circumstance to the Infanta, who was greatly interested by the rela-

tion, and expressed a desire to see the dove, whereupon Charles caused the bird to be conveyed to her.

Next morning the dove appeared as usual, and flying towards the prince's couch, evidently sought to attract his attention. Charles then remarked that a blue silken thread was tied round its neck, and on further investigation discovered that a tress of light golden hair was hidden beneath the bird's wing. He could not doubt to whom he owed the gift, and pressed it rapturously to his lips. Satisfied that he had now found a means of secret correspondence with his mistress, and determined to make trial of the dove's fidelity, he sought for a little diamond anchor which he had designed to present to the Infanta, and securing it in the same manner as the tress, carried the dove to the window, and cast it forth.

Charles watched the bird in its flight, and saw that it entered a window in the palace which he knew opened upon the Infanta's apartments.

In less than half an hour the little messenger returned, having accomplished its mission, and seemingly proud of the feat. The diamond anchor was gone, but in its place was the fragment of a kerchief, evidently just torn off, and embroidered with the letter "M," proving from whom it came.

Many a brief but tender missive was subsequently despatched by Charles to his mistress, but though the dove failed not to convey them, the prince received none in reply. Sometimes the Infanta would send her lover a flower, or other little token, but she only wrote once.

Only once! And it shall now be told how that note reached Charles.

He had been more than six months at the palace, and during the whole of that time the dove had never failed to greet him as he rose. One morning he missed his little visitant, and the circumstance filled him with sad forebodings, for it occurred at a period when fresh obstacles had arisen to the match. For the last few days

he had not seen the Infanta, who was staying at the time at the summer palace of El Buen Retiro.

When Charles awoke on the following morning, he glanced anxiously towards the open casement in the hope of beholding the dove, but it was not to be seen in the spot where it had been accustomed to alight. The same forebodings of ill which he had experienced on the previous day, assailed the prince, but with greater force. He sought to banish them by slumber, but he could not sleep, and as he raised himself in his couch, he perceived a white object lying on the floor near the window.

Springing from his couch, he flew to the spot, and then saw what had happened. The dove had been struck by a hawk, but, though mortally hurt, had escaped its pursuer, who had not dared to follow it into the room. It had fallen, as we have said, just within the casement, and was still beating the floor feebly with outspread wings. Its snowy plumage was dabbled with blood.

The wounded bird fluttered slightly in the prince's grasp, as he took it gently up. But with that faint struggle all was over. The little heart had ceased to beat—the faithful messenger could serve him no more. A sharp pang shot through the prince's heart as he gazed at the dead bird, and he now more than ever regarded the event as an evil omen.

"So, thou art gone, poor bird!" he ejaculated—"thou, who wert first to welcome me to this city, and hast ever since been my daily solace. In thought I have ever connected thee with her I love, and with my hopes of winning her, and now thou art stricken down. Poor bird, I shall miss thee sorely!"

In the pain which he felt at this catastrophe, Charles had not remarked that beneath the left wing of the dove there was a letter secured by a silken thread.

The blood-stained condition of the letter sadly diminished the delight with which Charles welcomed it, and

it was almost with a shudder that he opened it, and read as follows :

“ A masked fête will be given to-morrow night at the Buen Retiro, to which you are bidden. If you desire to exchange a few words in private with one who loves you, and must ever love you, though you seem not to value her love, you will find her beside the lake, near the foot of the avenue of lindens, at midnight.

“ Unless you can prove your love sincere, the meeting will be our last.

“ This letter will be conveyed to you by your little messenger, who has been kept a prisoner for a day for the purpose. Do not send an answer, as there would be a great risk of discovery.”

“ I could not send an answer if I would,” exclaimed Charles, mournfully, “ for my trusty little messenger is dead. Alas ! the sky, which looked so bright a short time ago, is now overcast. Why should she doubt my love ? Why should she say that the meeting may be our last ? But I must shake off these misgivings, which owe their origin to this sad accident. Let me look forward to a blissful interview to-morrow night. Will it be blissful ?” he added, with an involuntary shudder. “ Poor bird ! I would thou hadst escaped !”

IV.

SHOWING THAT THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE NEVER DID RUN SMOOTH.

CHARLES had just completed his toilette, which, contrary to royal usage, he performed without assistance, when Graham entered the chamber.

"What do I see?" cried the young man, aghast at the sight of the dove. "Your highness's favourite dove killed. I am right sorry for it."

"Think you the accident portends misfortune, Dick?" said Charles.

"It may signify a cross in love, especially if the poor bird brought a letter," replied Graham.

"The bird *did* bring a letter—the first I have received from the Infanta, and it may be the last I shall ever receive from her."

"Your highness attaches far too much importance to the accident," said Graham. "It is not strange that the poor dove should be killed, but it is marvellous that it should have escaped so long. Lovers, as I know from experience, are full of idle apprehensions."

"How does your own love-affair progress, Dick?"

"But indifferently," replied Graham. "The lady returns my passion, but her father has promised her to another, and, like a proud Castilian as he is, will not break his word, in spite of his daughter's tears and entreaties."

"A promise once made is sacred," remarked Charles. "In that respect, I myself am a Castilian."

"Your highness would think differently if you were circumstanced as I am," said Graham. "You would regard this rigorous adherence to a promise, which, I venture to say, ought never to have been made, as abominable obstinacy and cruelty. Doña Casilda also re-

gards it in that light. We are both of us well-nigh distracted."

"I am sorry for you, Dick," said the prince. "You are in a sad case. But you have only to thank yourself for the trouble into which you have got. You ought not to have fallen in love with Doña Casilda, if you knew she was engaged to another."

"But the mischief was done before I was aware of the engagement," replied Graham. "From the very moment when I first beheld Doña Casilda in the gorge of Pancorbo—your highness will remember the occasion—I fell desperately in love with her."

"That I can understand, but you ought to have conquered the passion."

"Impossible, your highness!—impossible!"

"At all events, you ought not to put yourself in the way of danger. You have been a daily visitant, as I understand, at the casa of the Conde de Saldana, and I myself have frequently seen you walking with Doña Casilda and Doña Flor in the Prado. At the great bullfight, it was said that you appeared as a picador merely to distinguish yourself before Doña Casilda, and sent her a trophy taken from the bull you had killed."

"All this is perfectly true, your highness," replied Graham. "But the Conde de Saldana desired me to make his house my home, and I took him at his word. My chivalrous feelings prompted me to pay attention to Doña Casilda."

"It is strange that the conde should permit the continuance of your visits, now that he has found out that you are enamoured of his daughter," observed Charles. "He is much to blame."

"If your highness pleases, I will tell you precisely what has occurred," said Graham.

"I shall be glad to hear it," replied Charles seating himself, and assuming an attitude of attention. "I have often intended to question you on the subject."

"I shall use no disguise," said Graham; "but, to make myself quite understood, I must go back to the com-

ment of the affair. Your highness is aware that I was very warmly received by the Conde de Saldana, who in Castilian fashion placed his house and all in it at my disposal, and I became his daily guest. But if my visits were agreeable to the conde and his daughter, they were by no means so to Don Christobal de Gavina, to whom Doña Casilda has the misfortune to be engaged, and that personage manifested his dislike to me in many ways, but at Casilda's request I avoided an open quarrel with him. On the other hand, the old conde's regard for me increased, and I became convinced that if he had not promised his daughter to Don Christobal, he would have preferred me as a son-in-law. Casilda thought so too. She began to find it difficult to maintain a semblance of love for Don Christobal, and this increased his hatred of me, to whom he justly attributed the change in her feelings. It being impossible that things could go on much longer in this way without a rupture, I came to the resolution, a few days ago, of unbosoming myself to the conde."

"I am glad to hear it," remarked Charles. "But you should have done so earlier."

"I sought an interview with him," said Graham, "and then told him that I had conceived the strongest passion for his daughter, who returned it with equal ardour, and that as neither of us could be happy apart from the other, I besought him to give me her hand. He listened to me with kindness, his countenance expressing much concern, and when I had done, he said, 'I ought to have foreseen this. I was to blame in allowing you to be so much together. I am very sorry for you both. I have a great regard for you, Don Ricardo. I love you as a son; and if I had another daughter I would give her to you. But I cannot give you Casilda.' 'Wherefore not?' I entreated. 'Because, as you know, I have promised her to Don Christobal, and my promise must be kept.' 'But you will not force her inclinations, señor conde?' I ventured to say. 'When the engagement took place, Casilda's heart was

disengaged, and she readily entered into it,' he replied. 'It cannot be broken off without the consent of Don Christobal.' 'But if you sacrifice your daughter to a man she cannot love, you will condemn her to a life of wretchedness,' I said. 'I will speak to Don Christobal, and will represent the matter to him in this light,' he said; 'and I trust I may prevail, but I own I have not much hope, for he is passionately attached to Casilda.' I thanked him warmly for his kindness, and he again promised that no efforts should be wanting on his part to accomplish the object.

"As chance would have it, Don Christobal did not make his appearance that day. So Casilda and I were kept in suspense. Next day, when I presented myself, as usual, I did not see the mistress of my heart, who was generally the first to greet me, and this circumstance filled me with sad forebodings, which were speedily verified. The conde sent for me to his library, and when I entered it, I found him alone. He looked grave and sad, and motioned me to take a chair. Without any preliminary observation, he said, 'I have seen Don Christobal, and have disguised nothing from him, but have told him exactly how matters stand—that Casilda has ceased to entertain any affection for him, and has given her heart to you. I therefore advised him to think of her no more, but to seek another bride, who would be more sensible of his merits. He was deaf to all my arguments, and peremptorily refused to liberate me from my promise.' 'But you do not intend to give Casilda to him, señor conde?' I cried, in despair. 'You will kill us both.' 'I cannot help it,' he replied, sadly. 'Since Don Christobal claims fulfilment of my promise, I must obey. You must see Casilda no more; and, painful as it is to me to do so, I must henceforth exclude you from my house.'

"All this was said with such kindness as in some degree to mitigate the severity of his words, and I could not doubt that he himself suffered much. 'You pass a sentence worse than death upon me, señor conde,' I

said; 'but before it is carried into execution, I beseech you to grant me a last interview with Casilda.' 'It will do no good,' he rejoined, 'and will only pain you both.' But I refused to leave the house till he complied, and at last, fearing from my excited state that I might do some violence, he yielded—making it, however, an express condition that our parting should be brief.

"I found Casilda dissolved in tears. She flung her arms round me, and declared she would not be separated from me. Between love and anxiety I was almost distracted, and scarce knew what to do. She declared she never would wed Don Christobal, and proposed immediate flight; but I represented to her that such a step was utterly impracticable. It was then arranged that she should elope as soon as preparations could be made—that a priest should be found to unite us—and that we should then hurry off to Santander, and embark for England."

"What! carry her off to England!" exclaimed Charles. "You must be crazed by passion to think of such a wild scheme. But I forbid it—peremptorily forbid it—on pain of my displeasure."

"Be pleased then to tell me what I am to do," rejoined Graham. "Casilda is determined to throw herself into my arms. Does your highness advise me to wed her, and take the chance of a reconciliation with her father afterwards? That, perhaps, would be the simplest plan, and the safest. A priest can always be found to perform the marriage ceremony."

"I advise no such course; and, in fact, I disapprove of the proceeding altogether," said Charles. "I recommend you to abandon the affair."

"What! give up Casilda!" exclaimed Graham. "I would sooner put on King Philip's livery and turn Romanist than do so. I begin to think your highness cannot really love the Infanta, or you would not recommend such a course to me."

"Well, then, do what you will, since counsel is thrown away," said Charles. "But answer me one question—

and answer it truly. Since the conde's house is closed to you, and Doña Casilda, no doubt, is carefully watched, what means have you of communicating with her?"

"Your highness may remember the fair damsel who was instrumental in delivering us from the brigands in the Forest of Orléans. It would be too long to tell you how Rose des Bois came to Madrid, and may suffice to state that she is now Doña Casilda's camerera, and aids me to communicate with the lady."

"I fear you are in bad hands," remarked Charles. "Rose may betray you."

"Your highness does her an injustice. Rose is a most faithful and devoted creature. I had some suspicions of her once myself, but they have wholly disappeared. She brings me a little billet-doux daily from her mistress, and takes back one in return. The last piece of intelligence I have received is, that Doña Casilda will be at the masked fête at the Buen Retiro to-morrow night. She has agreed to meet me at midnight, near the lake, at the end of the linden avenue."

"That must not be!" exclaimed Charles. "I am to meet the Infanta at the same hour and at the same place."

"That is awkward indeed," said Graham. "And by a strange chance, Doña Flor has made a similar appointment with the Duke de Cea. But of course we must give way to your highness."

"Nay, it matters not," observed Charles. "You can withdraw when you see the Infanta appear, and bid De Cea do so likewise."

"I will not fail," replied Graham.

At this moment the door opened, and the Earl of Bristol entered the chamber.

"Good morrow, my lord," said Charles. "I am glad to see you."

"I have come thus early, because I have something to say to your highness in private," rejoined Bristol.

On hearing this, Graham bowed to the prince, and retired.

V.

HOW THE EARL OF BRISTOL REMONSTRATED WITH THE PRINCE.

"Now, my lord," said Charles, "we are alone, and not likely to be interrupted, even by the Duke of Buckingham."

"It was specially to avoid his grace that I came thus early," returned the earl. "I will not preface what I am about to say by any observations, but come at once to the point. I hear it on all hands—from the chief nobles of the court—from the Conde-Duque—from the king himself—that your highness is about to make a public recantation and embrace the Roman Catholic faith. Now, though I have heard this statement made by those I have mentioned, I will not believe it unless it be confirmed from your own lips."

"Suppose the statement true," said Charles.

"But it *cannot* be true," cried Bristol. "I have denied it to all—and I will continue to deny it. I will not believe that your highness can have been persuaded to take a step so calamitous to yourself and to England—a step that will deeply afflict all your followers—and that will assuredly abridge your royal father's days, if it does not kill him outright. If, unhappily, you have yielded to the arguments of your enemies—for such they are—if you have formed any such fatal resolution—I beseech you to abandon it while there is yet time. Olivarez and the Papal Nuncio may have held out inducements to you to change your faith. But they have deluded you by false representations. Hear the truth from me. The Roman Catholic party has no power in England, and will never regain its power. What think you would be the effect in England if the news were brought that you—the heir to the throne—had become a convert to

Rome? Think you the step would be approved? Think you it would be tolerated? Think you the Infanta would be welcomed as an English princess? Prince, there would be a rebellion."

"If there should be, Olivarez has said that Spain will help me to crush it," remarked Charles.

"Not all the navies and armies of Spain could crush it," rejoined Bristol. "You will forfeit your throne if you take that step. But again I say, that I cannot—I will not believe it. Oh! give me the assurance that you will abandon this fatal resolution," he added, throwing himself at the prince's feet.

"Rise, my lord," said Charles. "I will not keep you a moment longer in suspense. I ought not to have trifled with your feelings, but I desired fully to test your zeal in behalf of the Protestant faith, and I rejoice to find it so earnest. Rest certain that my principles are unshaken, and that no consideration should induce me to embrace the religion of Rome."

"Your highness's words have taken a heavy load from my breast," said Bristol. "Have I your authority to contradict the rumour?"

"Not yet," replied Charles. "I would have Olivarez and the Nuncio still entertain the belief that they can gain me over."

"To what end?" asked Bristol, uneasily.

"Be content, my lord," rejoined Charles. "I can satisfy you no further now. If I play the hypocrite it is my own affair."

"I hope your highness may not play the part too long," said Bristol. "You may be caught in a snare, if you do not take heed. You are engaged with crafty and unscrupulous antagonists, who may prove too much for you. Empower me, I pray you, to contradict their assertions."

"I have said that it cannot be at present, my lord," rejoined Charles.

And seeing that the prince was immovable, Bristol bowed and retired.

VI.

BUCKINGHAM'S PLAN OF VENGEANCE.

LATER on in the same day Charles was alone in his cabinet, when Buckingham entered, and threw himself, as was his wont, carelessly into a chair.

"I am heartily sick of Madrid!" he exclaimed, "and long to get back to England. I should think your highness must be equally weary of this dull and monotonous court life."

"I do not find the court life either dull or monotonous," replied Charles. "There is plenty of amusement, and of every variety. The fêtes are endless."

"True, but I am tired of them," rejoined Buckingham. "Our dear dad and gossip is most anxious for our return. I begin to think we have stayed away too long from him."

"I think so too, Steenie," replied Charles. "But I do not intend to return till I can take my bride with me."

"Then you will stay till this time next year," said Buckingham, "for the marriage is no nearer completion than it was when we first arrived. Your highness has been shamefully trifled with, and you owe it to your own dignity to resent the treatment you have experienced."

"You are still smarting under the reprimand you received from the king, Steenie," said Charles.

"It is not likely that I should either forget it or forgive it," rejoined Buckingham. "But the insult to me was a far greater insult to your highness, and ought to have been resented. Since, however, you are not disposed to take offence, neither can I. But for your own sake, this negotiation must be brought to an end. If Philip continues to make further excuses for delay, say that the king your father has recalled you, and produce

the letter we have just received from his majesty. There is no other way to bring the matter to an issue."

"I shall have an interview with the Infanta to-morrow night at the masked fête at the Buen Retiro," said Charles. "After that I will decide."

"Nothing will come of the interview but disappointment," said Buckingham. "For my own part, I regard the affair as completely at an end. I have long felt that the marriage is impracticable, except upon terms which it is impossible to accept. The sooner, therefore, it is broken off the better. I will get you another bride. The Princess Henriette Marie of France will suit you better than the Infanta Maria."

"But my heart is given to Maria!" exclaimed Charles, with anguish.

"She is not worthy of you. She does not, or cannot, appreciate the depth of your regard."

"You mistake," rejoined Charles. "When she throws aside the mask which etiquette compels her to wear, you will judge her differently. I should have thought as you do if I had only seen her in public. Her nature is tender and affectionate."

"Does she love you sufficiently to change her religion for you?" said the duke.

"I do not require her to make the change," replied the prince.

"But she is not equally considerate. Nothing less than your conversion will content her."

"She is under the governance of her confessor and acts as he dictates," replied Charles.

"If such be the case—and there can be no doubt that your highness is right—what chance have you of a favourable settlement of the affair? Either you must conform, or the prize will be withheld. That is the condition which will now be exacted. Put the Infanta to the proof to-morrow night, when you see her at the Buen Retiro."

"I will," said Charles.

"And if she disappoints you—if she insists upon your conversion?"

"I will return to England," replied the prince.

"Promise me that," said Buckingham.

"I promise it," replied Charles, emphatically. "Tomorrow night the affair shall be decided."

"I am content," replied the duke, with secret exultation. "Under these circumstances it will be a satisfaction to your highness to learn that the fleet under the command of the Earl of Rutland has arrived off Santander. I have received a despatch from the noble admiral to that effect this very morning. He hopes he may soon convey the bride to England. I have but little expectation that he will be gratified in that respect, but, at all events, he will be ready to take back your highness, and the presence of the fleet at this juncture is fortunate, for, depend upon it, Olivarez will not let you slip through his fingers, if he can help it. The Duke de Lerma warned us of his perfidy. Ever since we have been in Madrid he has been a secret enemy. He insulted me, and strove to humiliate me in the presence of the king and the state council. But I will requite him. I will lower his pride. I have it in my power to wound him in the tenderest point, and I will not spare him."

"What are you about to do?" inquired Charles, uneasily.

"He is very jealous of his wife," replied Buckingham, "and, sooth to say, the countess is lovely enough to make any man jealous. When I first beheld her, I was fascinated by her beauty, and perhaps it was the admiration which I could not help expressing that gave me some interest in her eyes. Certain it is that she did not discourage my attentions. Perhaps she did no more than most married Spanish women do, but whatever hopes her manner towards me may have excited, I checked them."

"I am glad to hear that, at all events," observed Charles. "I feared the contrary."

"I checked them for a time," pursued the duke, "and should have checked them altogether, if Olivarez had not affronted me. I considered how I could requite him, and soon perceived that vengeance was in my power. Your highness will guess my meaning."

Charles made no reply, and Buckingham went on:

"I paid assiduous court to the countess, and soon found that she was not likely to offer any desperate resistance to the attack. In fact, she did not resist my advances, and it was quite clear that my conquest would be easily achieved."

"Had any one but yourself told me this, I would not have believed it," remarked Charles.

"To make an end of my relation," pursued Buckingham, "I have prevailed upon her to grant me an interview to-morrow night in the gardens of the Buen Retiro."

"Why there?" demanded Charles. "You will run great risk of discovery."

"I mean that the meeting *shall* be discovered—and by her husband," rejoined Buckingham.

"Such revenge is atrocious, Steenie," said Charles. "I trust you will forego the plan. If not for the Conde-Duque's sake, for that of the countess, who confides in you, do not bring disgrace upon a noble house."

"Well, I will reflect upon it," rejoined Buckingham.

Persuaded he had turned the duke from his vindictive purpose, Charles said no more on the subject, and shortly afterwards they went forth to ride in the valley of the Manzanares.

VII.

THE MASKED FÊTE AT THE BUEN RETIRO.

DESIGNED by Olivarez as a retreat for his youthful sovereign, charmingly situated, and embellished with the most refined taste, the summer palace, so appropriately denominated *El Buen Retiro*, had but recently been completed at the period of our history.

In this delicious retreat Philip cast off the cares of sovereignty, and spent hours in the companionship of Lope de Vega, Calderon de la Barca, and Velasquez. And here Olivarez put off the minister, and appeared only as a courtier.

The salons of the *Buen Retiro* were exquisitely furnished, and adorned with the choicest paintings. The gardens were enchanting—full of terraces, fountains, bosquets, orange-groves, flower-beds, parterres, pavilions, grassy slopes, and cool retreats.

On the night of the masked fête, at which we are about to assist, the assemblage numbered all the grantees and important personages of the court, including the Nuncio and the ambassadors, together with the English nobles and gentlemen in attendance upon Charles. The dresses were gorgeous, and jewels and precious stones were by no means confined to the female portion of the assemblage. The diamonds glittering on the attire of the Duke of Buckingham outshone those of any one present. All the company were provided with black velvet masks, which they assumed or laid aside at pleasure.

Dancing took place in a superb and brilliantly-lighted salon adapted for the purpose, and the ball was opened by the king and the Infanta, who danced a bolero, and charmed the beholders with their skill and grace. Other couples stood up at the same time, and amongst them

were the Duke of Buckingham and the Countess Olivarez, who executed the dance quite as gracefully as the royal pair.

A string of magnificent pearls, worn by Buckingham, broke during the dance, and this accident—if accident it was—afforded his grace an opportunity of presenting the gems to the fair bystanders, who had picked them up—a piece of gallantry that gained him great admiration. It was remarked that the duke's manner towards the countess was singularly impassioned.

Charles took no part in the dance, but remained with the queen, seated beneath a canopy. The fandango succeeded the bolero, and the cachuca the fandango, and the rattle of the castanets were still heard merrily as ever in the ball-room, when the royal party, with a select portion of the company, proceeded to the theatre—for the Buen Retiro had its theatre, and a very charming little theatre too—where a comedy, written for the occasion by Lope de Vega, was admirably performed by the court actors.

The comedy, which was full of wit, and point, and intricate adventure, contained many allusions to the prince's chivalrous expedition to Madrid, and was loudly applauded; and at its conclusion the author received the compliments of the king and Charles, and was more substantially gratified by a purse of gold from the latter.

After the performance, the banqueting-chamber was thrown open, and a sumptuous repast served, of which the principal guests partook; but the royal party, including Charles, supped in a small oval chamber in private.

Supper over, the company went forth into the gardens, which were illuminated, and the trees being hung with lamps of various hues, looked as if they bore such fruit as was grown in the orchards of the Hesperides. The night was magnificent, the moon being at the full, and the air perfectly calm.

About an hour before midnight there was a grand display of fireworks, which could be seen by the crowds

assembled in the Prado; and after this the majority of the company returned to the ball-room, or to the banqueting-chamber, while a few, who preferred the open air, continued in the gardens.

All the marble seats along the terraces had occupants, and couples were moving slowly across the soft sward, listening, it may be, to the nightingales. However, we shall not pry into their discourse, but follow two graceful-looking señoras, who were proceeding down the long avenue of linden-trees leading to the lake. They moved too quickly to notice the magical effect produced by the coloured lamps on the numerous statues lining the walk, and though they looked back occasionally, they did not pause till they reached the borders of the lake.

Here all was tranquil. The trees were gilded by the moonbeams, and the surface of the little lake glittered like silver. The calmness and serenity of the scene offered a strong contrast to the revel they had just quitted.

Shortly after the arrival of the two señoras, the dip of oars was heard in the water, and a boat was seen to issue from a little creek at the farther end of the lake, and make its way towards them. The bark was propelled by a couple of rowers, and two cavaliers were seated in the stern, one of whom touched the chords of a guitar, and chanted a serenade in a low sweet voice, as he came along.

In another minute the bark reached the spot where Doña Casilda and Doña Flor were stationed—for it will have been conjectured, we presume, that they were the masked señoras—and De Cea and Graham leaped ashore. A few exclamations of delight were uttered, and then De Cea besought Doña Flor to embark with him, nor did it require much persuasion to induce her to assent. Before they entered the boat, it was agreed that the others should join them at the farther end of the lake.

Thus freighted, the boat cut its way through the moonlit water, but the tinkling of the guitar was no more heard.

Meanwhile, Graham and Casilda moved slowly on, keeping near the margin of the pool.

Lovers' discourse is idle, and scarcely worth repeating.

"Have you ever such lovely nights as this in England, Ricardo?" inquired Casilda. "Do the nightingales sing as sweetly in your groves? Is the air as balmy? And does the moon shine as brightly?"

"You will judge," replied Graham. "If you do not like my country, you shall come back to Spain."

"Ah! I shall be happy with you anywhere, Ricardo," she replied. "But if I am to be yours, my flight must not be long delayed, or it will be impossible. I shall be forced into a marriage with Don Christobal."

"Nay, that shall never be," cried Graham. "You are mine—mine only, Casilda—and no hated rival shall rob me of my treasure. I yesterday acquainted the prince with my plan, but he disapproves it."

"But you will not be guided by him—you will not abandon me?" cried Casilda. "If you do, I shall die of despair."

"Fear nothing; I have no such thought. Even if I incur the prince's displeasure, and forfeit the Duke of Buckingham's favour, I will not swerve from my faith to you! Be prepared to-morrow night. I will scale the garden wall at midnight. You shall join me, and then——"

"Hush!" she exclaimed, with a gesture of caution; adding, in a low voice, "We are watched. There is some one among the trees."

"I can perceive no one," rejoined Graham, glancing in the direction indicated. "But it may be the prince. He was to meet the Infanta near the lake about this hour."

"You reassure me," she rejoined. "I feared it might be Don Christobal, and that he had overheard what we said. And yet that is not likely either, for we left him in the ball-room, about to join the dance."

In another moment they were buried in the shade of some trees that grew near the water, and as Graham

cast a look backwards, he perceived two figures near the foot of the avenue, and drew Casilda's attention to them.

"Look!" he cried, "I was right. Yonder are the prince and the Infanta."

VIII.

THE MEETING BY THE LAKE.

AFTER the display of fireworks, Charles remained in the garden with the Earl of Bristol, Lord Kensington, and some other English nobles, and then, giving them to understand that he desired to be alone for a while, he left them, and walked down the avenue to the lake.

So beauteous was the scene, so steeped in calmness, that an immediate effect was produced upon his feelings, and almost forgetting why he had come thither, he fell into a delicious and dreamy reverie, from which he was roused by light footsteps near him. Turning at the sound, he perceived two female figures, both wrapped in dark silk mantles, and masked.

As he advanced towards them, one of the ladies retired, and remained standing at a little distance.

"I have run great risk in keeping my appointment with you, prince," said the Infanta, as she removed her mask, "and I cannot stay more than a few minutes."

"Oh, say not so, Maria!" cried Charles. "This is a spot where hours might be spent in loving converse."

"You talk of hours as if time were at my command," she replied. "Were I to remain long, my absence from the palace would infallibly be discovered, and as it is, I am full of apprehension. But I must not waste time, for I have much to say to you."

"I am all attention. Say on, sweet princess. Your

voice is more charming to me than the song of the nightingales."

"What I have to say may not please you," she rejoined; "but all my future happiness depends upon your answer to the question I am about to put to you. You can guess it. You know the subject nearest my heart. You know towards what end my prayers are directed. Has Heaven enlightened you and moved your breast? Are you prepared to recant your errors, and embrace the true faith?"

A profound sigh was Charles's sole response

"I must have an answer," she replied, withdrawing the hand he had taken.

"You say our meeting must necessarily be brief, Maria," he remarked. "Do not let us mar our happiness by this discussion. It is out of character with the spot—with the serene beauty of the night. Let us devote the few minutes we have together to love—to tender thoughts."

"But I cannot continue to love you, unless you will give me an assurance that you will conform," said the Infanta. "Why this hesitation? You have led me to suppose you would become a convert."

"Forgive the deception I have practised, Maria. It is love that has made me play the dissembler."

"Then you have deluded me with false hopes? You never intended to change your faith? Prince, such conduct is unworthy of you. But you cannot honourably retreat. I must hold you to your promise. Either you must become a convert, or our engagement is at an end. You must come to an immediate decision."

"But why drive matters to this fearful extremity, Maria?"

"The extremity is as fearful to me as to you, Charles," she rejoined. "Listen to what I say. I have solemnly promised the Nuncio, in the presence of my confessor, never to wed a heretic."

"Why did you do this, Maria?" cried Charles, in a voice of anguish.

"Because I believed you would become a convert. And you will, Charles—you will!" she exclaimed.

"I cannot," he rejoined.

"Then you are resolved to renounce me. You love me not."

"Oh! say not so, Maria. I love you too well. But I cannot change my faith."

"Will not my entreaties move you? Can you be insensible to my anguish? Padre Ambrosio and the Nuncio will question me to-morrow. What shall I say to them? May I hold out any hopes?"

"None!—none!" he replied. "I have gone too far already."

"This, then, is your decision?" she cried.

"It is my final decision," he rejoined, sadly but firmly.

"All, then, is over!" said Maria. "My dream of happiness is ended!"

"Why should it be so?" cried Charles. "The Nuncio, if he pleases, can absolve you from your promise, however solemnly made—and perchance it was extorted from you. The king your brother and his cabinet do not impose any such terms. I have agreed to all their conditions."

"Be not deceived, Charles," she replied, sadly. "The marriage-treaty will never be concluded unless you concede this point. Such is Philip's secret resolution. He and Olivarez fully calculate upon your compliance. And you yourself have led them into the belief."

"I see my error now," rejoined Charles. "But it may be retrieved."

"No, that is impossible, if you persist in your resolution," she said.

A sudden interruption to their discourse was offered at this juncture by the lady in attendance upon the Infanta, who, stepping quickly towards them, warned them that some one was at hand.

Scarcely had they resumed their masks, when two cavaliers emerged from the bosquet, and marched quickly up to them. As neither of these personages were masked,

and their features were revealed by the bright moonlight, Charles knew them to be Don Christobal and Don Pompeo.

"What means this interruption, señores?" he said, haughtily. "Retire."

"Not without these ladies," rejoined Don Christobal.

"You are mistaken, señor," said Charles. "Do you not see that you cause the ladies great alarm?"

"Possibly we may—but that cannot be helped," rejoined Don Christobal. "We are sorry to interrupt your tête-à-tête, but you must be pleased to excuse us. Come with me, señora!" he cried, seizing the Infanta's hand.

"And do you come with me, madam," added Don Pompeo, taking the hand of the other lady.

"Let go your hand instantly, señor, or, by Heaven, you will repent it!" cried Charles. "This lady desires to stay with me."

"That is easily to be perceived," rejoined Don Christobal. "But I do not intend she shall. Come along, madam!"

Don Pompeo at the same time tried to force away the other lady.

"Unhand me instantly, señor, I command you," cried the Infanta to Don Christobal.

"Not yet," he replied, with a laugh.

Finding there was no alternative, Maria took off her mask, and her features being thus revealed to the astonished Don Christobal, he instantly recognised the Infanta, and falling on his knee before her, he exclaimed, "Pardon, princess, pardon! I took you for Doña Casilda."

"And I took you for my wife, Doña Flor," cried Don Pompeo to the other lady, who had likewise unmasked.

"You have been guilty of a great indiscretion, señores," said Charles, taking off his vizard. "But you must forget whom you have seen—do you understand?"

"Perfectly," replied both cavaliers addressed; "your highness need have no apprehension."

At this moment voices were heard, and several persons were seen coming down the avenue.

"It is the king, with the Conde-Duque," said Don Christobal.

"The king! oh, Heavens! I shall be discovered," cried the Infanta.

"Take refuge in yonder pavilion, princess," said Don Christobal. "His majesty is not likely to visit it."

"Shall I go there?" said Maria to her attendant.

"No, no," replied the lady; "anywhere but there. Princess, you must not go."

"She must, or she will be discovered," cried Charles. "Try to detain the king for a moment, señores."

"We will," replied Don Christobal, hurrying off with Don Pompeo towards the avenue.

Charles then took the Infanta's hand, and would have conducted her to the pavilion, but the lady stopped them.

"Prince," she cried, "the Infanta must not enter that pavilion."

"But I will leave her at the door," rejoined Charles. "Do not hesitate, Maria."

"She shall not go, I repeat," said the lady, peremptorily.

"What is to be done?" cried the Infanta. "The king will be here in a moment."

"Have no fear, princess," rejoined the lady. "The Conde-Duque is with him."

"But I dare not meet my brother. I will hide somewhere," cried the Infanta. And she flew towards a bosquet, followed by Charles and the lady.

Scarcely had they concealed themselves amongst the shrubs, when the boat containing Graham, De Cea, and the two ladies, crossed the lake, and landed its party.

IX.

HOW THE TABLES WERE TURNED UPON BUCKINGHAM.

WHEN the king got to the foot of the avenue, he stopped, and said to Olivarez,

"I must now call upon your excellency to explain why you have brought me here?"

"Accompany me to yonder pavilion, and your curiosity shall be satisfied, sire," rejoined Olivarez.

"On, then, to the pavilion!" exclaimed Philip.

But he was stopped by Don Christobal, who, placing himself in the way, said, "I pray your majesty not to enter that pavilion."

"Why not?" demanded Philip.

"Because you will interrupt a tête-à-tête."

"Between whom?" demanded the king.

"Speak out," said Olivarez.

"Between two important personages," replied Don Christobal, scarcely knowing what he said. "Your excellency will be sorry if you do not take my advice," he added significantly to the Conde-Duque. "I have good reasons for offering it."

"A word with you, Don Christobal," said the king, taking him aside. "Answer me frankly, and you may prevent an unpleasant discovery."

"Such is my wish, sire," replied Don Christobal, "I am quite sure the discovery will be disagreeable to your majesty."

"But I must know who is in the pavilion."

"Excuse me, sire, I dare not inform you."

"I will have an answer," said Philip. "Is the countess there?"

"What countess, sire?"

"Do not equivocate. I ask you if the Countess Olivarez is in yonder pavilion?"

"I have reason to believe she is there, sire," replied Don Christobal, thinking she was the lady in attendance upon the Infanta.

"And the duke?"

"The duke, sire!"

"Ay, the Duke of Buckingham. You see I know it. His grace is there."

"Since your majesty will have it so, I will not presume to contradict you," replied Don Christobal, who was now completely mystified.

"Let us leave the pavilion unvisited, and return to the palace," observed the king to Olivarez. "I am satisfied with what I have just heard."

"But I am not," said the Conde-Duque. "And I must beg your majesty to go on with me."

"Nay, if you are determined, be it so," rejoined Philip.

And he proceeded with his attendants towards the pavilion.

On the way thither he encountered Graham and De Cea, and the two ladies with them.

Philip commanded the party to unmask, and the injunction being obeyed, a discovery ensued which resulted in Doña Casilda and Doña Flor being transferred to the care of Don Christobal and Don Pompeo.

The king had hoped that the delay caused by this incident would give time to those within the pavilion to escape, and he was somewhat surprised when, as he approached the little structure, the door opened, and the duke of Buckingham and a lady issued from it.

The lady was masked, but not so the duke.

The lady, whom Philip and several others felt certain was the Countess Olivarez, appeared embarrassed and uneasy, and clung to the duke's arm; but Buckingham manifested no concern. Making an obeisance to the king, he moved slowly on.

As he expected, however, he was stopped by Olivarez.

"I have a word to say to your grace," remarked the Conde-Duque.

"As many as your excellency pleases on some fitting occasion, but not now," replied Buckingham.

"All I desire to ask is whether you have been long in that pavilion?" said Olivarez.

"Your excellency is curious. Perhaps five minutes—perhaps ten—perhaps half an hour. I came there after the fireworks."

"And the lady has been with you all the time?" pursued Olivarez.

"That is a question I must really decline to answer," said Buckingham.

"Your grace is perfectly right," replied Philip.

"Stay!" cried Olivarez. "I have not yet done. I must beg the lady to unmask."

"The request is absurd," rejoined Buckingham. "Possibly her husband may be present."

"For that very reason I must insist," said Olivarez.

"I recommend you not to do so," remarked Philip. "Let them go on."

Olivarez, however, was not to be gainsaid, but called out:

"Madam, I order you to unmask."

"Hold, madam!" cried Buckingham. "Before you comply, let me say one word to his excellency."

"I will listen to no remarks," rejoined Olivarez.

"Unmask, madam, unmask!"

"Save me! oh! save me!" exclaimed the lady, in piteous accents.

"I would willingly save you, but I have not the power," rejoined Buckingham. "Since his excellency commands you to unmask, you must comply. But he will regret his folly, when he finds it is his own wife."

"What, my lord duke!" exclaimed the king. "Would you have us believe this is the Countess Olivarez?"

"I would have you believe your own eyes, sire, not my assertion," replied Buckingham, with an exulting glance at Olivarez.

But his glance of triumph changed to one of confusion as the lady withdrew her mask, disclosing a young and handsome countenance.

The features, however, were not those of the Countess Olivarez.

A derisive laugh from the Conde-Duque, in which all the beholders joined, added to Buckingham's rage and mortification.

"Why, this is better than the comedy we have just witnessed," said Philip, laughing.

"It was one of the actresses in that comedy, sire," said the lady.

"Cheated by an actress!" exclaimed Buckingham.

"Yes, my lord duke, by an actress," rejoined Olivarez. "Madam, you may retire. Your part is played."

On this, the actress resumed her mask, and withdrew.

"Lope de Vega must have given you a hint for this plot," said the king, laughing.

"No, sire, the idea is entirely my own," replied Olivarez. "This is all the retaliation I mean to take upon the Duke of Buckingham for the injury he intended me."

"You have made me supremely ridiculous, that I admit, my lord," cried Buckingham. "But it is a pity the countess is not here to join in the laugh against me."

"The countess is here," she replied, stepping forward. "Are you satisfied, my lord?" she added, removing her mask.

"Oh, madam! how you have deceived me!" cried Buckingham.

"You have deceived yourself, my lord duke," rejoined the countess. "I revealed all to my husband, and we contrived this scheme to punish your presumption. Ha! ha! ha!"

Again there was a general laugh, in which Buckingham himself thought it best to join.

"Well, I own I have been fairly taken in," he said. "The Conde-Duque may congratulate himself upon the

treasure he possesses. Henceforward he can never be jealous."

"I never have been jealous, my lord," said Olivarez, sharply. "Have I, madam?"

"You have had no cause for jealousy," she replied.

"Certainly, Lope de Vega must have had a hand in this," laughed the king. "But you have not explained how you chanced to be here, countess," he added.

"I came here with the Infanta, sire," she replied.

"What! is the Infanta here?" cried Philip.

"Yes, sire," she replied, stepping forward and unmasking.

"The comedy will never end," said Philip. "It would not surprise me to find that the prince himself has a part in it."

"Only that of spectator, sire," replied Charles, advancing.

"So you are here!" exclaimed Philip. "By Santiago! I must have some explanation."

"All shall be explained anon, and to your majesty's satisfaction," replied Olivarez. "Has the prince consented?" he added in a whisper to the Infanta.

"Alas! no!" she rejoined, in the same tone. "He refuses."

"Refuses!" exclaimed Olivarez. "He shall not quit Madrid till I have wrung consent from him. Sire, let us return to the palace. I shall have much to say to you to-morrow."

"Come with me, Maria," said Philip. "I shall not lose sight of you again."

The Infanta took the king's arm, and Charles walked on her other side, as they proceeded up the avenue to the palace.

End of the Fifth Book.

BOOK VI.—EL JUEGO DE CANAS.

I.

HOW CHARLES ANNOUNCED HIS DEPARTURE TO THE KING.

ON the morning after the fête at the Buen Retiro, Philip, having made an appointment with the minister, drove to the palace, and, on entering his cabinet, found Olivarez and the Nuncio waiting for him.

"Your majesty will understand why I am here," said the Nuncio. "It is to confer with you in regard to the proposed marriage between the Prince of Wales and the Infanta. Acting by my advice, the Infanta obtained last night a decisive answer from the prince. He declines to conform."

"I lament to hear it," replied Philip. "His conversion would have been a great triumph to the faith, and the failure will be a deep disappointment to his Holiness."

"We have received a temporary check, but are not defeated," observed the Nuncio.

"How! Do you still indulge a hope of success?" cried the king.

"Most assuredly," replied the Nuncio; "but we must have recourse to more stringent measures. The Conde-Duque will inform your highness that the prince designs to return to England."

"Is this so?" asked Philip.

"Yes, sire," replied Olivarez. "The Duke of Buckingham informs me that his highness has just received a letter from King James, wherein his majesty complains of the delay in regard to the marriage, and enjoins his son's immediate return."

"But this you will not permit, sire," said the Nuncio.

"I see not how I can prevent it," replied Philip.

"Heaven has placed the prince in your hands," rejoined the Nuncio, "and you will be wanting to yourself, sire—you will be wanting in duty to our Church—if you allow him to depart without first accomplishing his conversion."

"But you tell me he has absolutely refused," said Philip. "I cannot force him into compliance."

"Time and persuasion may accomplish much," remarked the Nuncio, with a significant smile.

"This sudden change in the prince's sentiments has been wrought by Buckingham," observed Olivarez, "whose aim is now to break off the match. His highness showed every disposition to recant, and would have done so, but for the baneful representations of his favourite."

"The prince is perfectly tractable, I am convinced," remarked the Nuncio. "Get rid of Buckingham, and there will be no further difficulty."

"But how shall we get rid of him?" exclaimed Philip. "He will not leave without the prince."

"He must, and shall," said Olivarez.

"But Charles will not remain after his favourite's departure," remarked the king.

"Not voluntarily, perhaps, sire," rejoined Olivarez, significantly; "but he will stay, nevertheless."

"Detain him, sire," said the Nuncio. "Let him not escape from your hands, or you will be greatly to blame. His captivity—if captivity it can be called—will neither be irksome nor of long duration, for if the present adverse influence be removed, I will engage that his conversion shall be speedily accomplished. Your duty to the Church is paramount to every other consideration. I call upon you to assist in bringing back Charles Stuart to the fold."

Before Philip could make any reply, an usher announced the prince and the Duke of Buckingham.

"Be firm, sire," said the Nuncio, rising to depart.

"Stay," cried Philip. "I wish you to be present at this interview."

After the customary greetings had passed between Charles and the king, Philip remarked :

"Your highness, I understand, has just received a letter from the king your father?"

"I have, sire," replied Charles; "and it is in reference to that letter that I have come to your majesty. My immediate return to England appears absolutely necessary. The king my father complains sadly of my prolonged absence. His health is declining, as your majesty is aware, and he needs my attention. If there were any likelihood of an early completion of the marriage-treaty, his majesty would consent to my sojourn here till the affair could be settled, but as he cannot anticipate this, he has recalled me. I need not say that the necessity I am under of obeying his orders is a great grief to me, but I cannot refuse compliance with them. I have therefore come to announce my early departure to your majesty, and to thank you for the truly royal hospitality you have shown me during my stay." After a brief pause, he added, "In regard to the marriage, I have this proposition to make. On the arrival of the dispensation, the ceremony can be performed by proxy, and I will entreat your majesty to be my representative on the occasion."

"I would fain hope that such a course may be avoided," said Olivarez. "If your highness departs while the treaty is still in abeyance, it will be thought that the marriage is broken off."

"Is there any chance that the marriage will take place soon?" said Buckingham.

"When we obtain the dispensation from his Holiness there shall be no further delay on our part," replied Olivarez.

"That has ever been the answer," said Buckingham. "My royal master's patience is exhausted, and indeed he entertains the belief that the Pope will not grant the dispensation."

"There he is wrong, my lord duke," remarked the Nuncio. "His holiness earnestly desires the fulfilment

of the match, and will promote it to the utmost of his power. I authorise you to convey my assurance to King James, that so far as the Sovereign Pontiff is concerned there shall be little further delay. The affair, I hope, will be speedily settled."

"But upon what terms?" demanded Buckingham.

"Upon terms that will be perfectly satisfactory to the prince, I make no doubt," said the Nuncio.

"His highness must feel grateful for the Pope's consideration," said Buckingham.

"I entreat your highness to continue my guest a little longer," said Philip. "Your sudden departure will distress the Infanta, and on her account I urge you to stay, if only for a few weeks, when I trust the matter may be completed. The Duke of Buckingham can proceed to England at once. His presence will be a consolation to your royal father, and he can give the king assurance of your speedy arrival with your bride."

"Can I, with safety, give him such assurance, sire?" asked the duke.

"Most certainly," interposed Olivarez.

"Does this arrangement meet with your highness's approval?" said Buckingham, addressing Charles. "Am I to go alone? I do not think the king your father will be satisfied."

"I am sure he will not," said Charles. "Despite the inducements held out to me by your majesty, I must therefore adhere to my plan."

"Your highness will do wrong to depart," said the Nuncio. "Let the Duke of Buckingham go first, as proposed by his majesty."

"On all accounts I urge your highness to stay for a brief period," added Olivarez.

"You will not disoblige me by leaving me thus suddenly, prince?" said Philip. "I really cannot part with you."

"But I cannot disobey the king my father, sire. He has recalled me."

"Send word by his grace that I will not let you go," said Philip.

"Were I to send such a message as that, he would think I am detained," replied Charles.

"What matter if he should think so?" remarked Olivarez.

"Prince," said Buckingham to Charles, "you were entrusted to my charge by your royal father. I cannot consent that you should remain here after my departure. You have been summoned by the king, and must return to England."

"Must return!" echoed Olivarez. "Your presumption goes too far, my lord. I trust his highness will convince you that you have no authority over him."

"Your excellency had best speak out," said Buckingham, "and tell his highness, in plain terms, that he is a prisoner. If such be the case, I am a prisoner likewise, for I shall not depart without him."

"You will leave Madrid within twenty-four hours, my lord duke," said Philip.

"With the prince, sire?"

"Alone," rejoined the king.

"I cannot misunderstand this injunction, sire," said Charles. "I now see the position in which I have placed myself. I came here because I believed—and would have maintained the belief, if called upon—that Philip IV of Spain was the soul of loyalty and honour. It seems I was mistaken."

"His majesty acts by my advice, prince," said Olivarez. "He knows that the Duke of Buckingham is animated by a spirit of determined hostility to himself and his cabinet—that he is secretly opposed to the match—and desiring that you should not be subjected to such baneful influence, he removes him. If his majesty seeks to detain you for a short time longer, it is merely in the hope—in the belief, indeed—that all will be satisfactorily arranged."

"Are you willing to remain, prince?" said Philip.

"Your majesty has prevented me from answering the question," said Charles.

"Hear me, sire," said Buckingham. "The English

fleet has arrived off Santander. I scarcely think the Earl of Rutland, who commands it, will be willing to sail without the prince."

"His majesty will treat that threat with the scorn it deserves," remarked Olivarez, disdainfully.

"The prince shall leave Spain in any manner he pleases," said Philip.

"Sire!" exclaimed Olivarez.

"The prince, I repeat, is free to depart now, or at any time," said Philip. "Far be it from me to detain him against his inclinations."

"Then I have misunderstood you, sire," cried Charles.

"You have," replied Philip, disregarding the looks addressed to him by Olivarez and the Nuncio. "If I have displayed over-anxiety to detain you, it has been from the belief that we could arrange the matter. But I will say no more on this head. I leave the decision entirely to yourself. If your departure is abrupt, it will be thought that our good understanding has been interrupted. Stay with me a week longer, and I shall be content."

"I will gladly do so," replied Charles, "but I cannot send away the Duke of Buckingham."

"Let him stay, then," said Philip.

"All chance of accomplishing our object is at an end," whispered Olivarez to the Nuncio.

"Something may be done in a week," rejoined the latter.

"Not since Buckingham is allowed to remain," said Olivarez.

"I am sorry to lose you so soon, prince," said Philip, "but I will do my best to make the remainder of your stay agreeable to you."

"Your majesty has done far too much already," returned Charles. "I shall write to the king my father announcing my immediate return."

Making an obeisance to the king, he then withdrew with Buckingham;

II.

THE CLOAK AND THE SWORD.

MIDNIGHT.

A coach drove into the Prado, and set down two cavaliers, who, bidding the coachman await their return, proceeded along the footpath leading in the direction of the Puerta de Recoletos.

They were muffled in their cloaks, and wore their hats pulled over the brow, so as effectually to conceal their features. That they were bound upon some amorous errand was certain. Each carried a dark lantern beneath his mantle, and one of them was provided with a rope-ladder. The points of their long rapiers appeared below their cloaks.

They moved along in silence, unconscious that they were cautiously followed by two other persons muffled in cloaks like themselves, and armed in like manner, who had issued from among the trees skirting the road.

At length the foremost gallants came to a large casa, in front of which was a garden surrounded by high walls like those of a convent. In this wall there was a gate, which they tried, hoping it might be left unfastened, but it did not yield. They next glanced around, but could perceive no one, for those who followed had concealed themselves.

Apprehending no danger, the gallants proceeded with their work. Quickly securing the rope-ladder to the top of the wall, they mounted, drew the ladder after them, and descended on the other side.

As soon as they had disappeared, the two persons who were watching them came up, and one of them remarked to the other:

“Rose’s information was correct. They are about to make the attempt.”

"Shall we give the alarm?" rejoined the other.

"No, let us wait here," returned the first speaker. "They are sure to come out by this gate."

Leaving them to keep watch, we will now follow the two gallants, who had obtained admittance to the garden.

Moving with noiseless footsteps, and keeping close to the wall, they proceeded towards the casa, but on nearing it could discern no sign that they were expected. All seemed buried in repose. They did not dare to give any signal to make known their presence, but waited patiently.

At last the slight creaking of a casement announced that some one was coming forth, and in another moment a female figure, wrapped in a mantilla, and with her features concealed by a black velvet mask, was seen upon the terrace.

Not doubting for a moment that it was Casilda whom he beheld, Graham flew towards her, and would have given utterance to a few passionate words expressive of his delight, but she checked him by a gesture imposing silence, and they then hurried towards the garden gate.

"Have you the key?" asked Graham, as they reached it.

Without a word she gave it to him, and in another moment the gate was unlocked.

"Now you are mine—mine only, Casilda," cried Graham. "You quit your father's house to become my bride."

Even to this address the masked female made no reply, and the door being opened, Graham started back, on perceiving the two cavaliers stationed outside.

"Confusion!" he exclaimed. "We are discovered. What is to be done?"

For a moment he remained irresolute, not knowing whether to advance or retreat, but then deciding upon the bolder course, he cried:

"Who are you, señores?—and what do you want?"

"Who we are matters little," replied a voice, which Graham at once recognised as that of Don Christobal. "We are here to protect the Conde Saldana from robbers."

"We are caballeros, as we will quickly convince you, not robbers," rejoined Graham, haughtily.

"The Conde de Saldana will account you the worst of robbers, for you are attempting to steal from him his chief treasure—his daughter. Luckily, we have been informed of your purpose, and are in time to prevent it."

"We have allowed you to proceed thus far with your project, in order that you should not be able to deny it," said the other, whose voice proclaimed him to be Don Pompeo.

"Rose has betrayed us! Fool that I was to trust her!" cried Graham. "Our scheme is defeated," he added in a low voice to the masked female. "Regain the house as quickly as you can, and leave us to settle with them."

But she clung to him as if she could not tear herself away.

"Forgive me for what I have done, Sir Richard," she murmured. "I was impelled to it by jealousy."

"This is not Casilda's voice," cried Graham, starting. "Unmask yourself at once, señora, and satisfy my doubts."

And as the damsel tremblingly obeyed, he held his lantern towards her, and discovered the features of Rose.

"Rose!" he exclaimed. "Malediction! have I been duped?"

"How is this, Don Ricardo?" cried Don Christobal, laughing derisively. "You have got the maid instead of the mistress."

"A capital jest," laughed Don Pompeo. "You have been fairly tricked, Don Ricardo—ha! ha! ha!"

"You shall find it no jest, I can promise you, señores," cried Graham, fiercely. "Away, minion!" he added to Rose, who fled towards the house.

No sooner was he freed from her, than Graham drew his rapier, and springing through the gate, confronted the others. He was followed by De Cea, who closed the gate after him.

On seeing them advance in this hostile fashion, Don Christobal and Don Pompeo stepped back a few paces, drew their rapiers, and stood on guard.

"If I am not mistaken, the Duke de Cea is with you, señor," cried Don Pompeo.

"I am here," rejoined the duke.

"I am glad of it," said Don Pompeo. "I have an account to settle with you."

"You shall find me prompt to discharge it," said De Cea.

While these few words were exchanged, rapid preparations had been made on either side for the conflict.

Graham and De Cea threw their cloaks on the ground, but each retained his dark lantern. Their adversaries unfastened their mantles, but held them on the left arm for use, offensive and defensive, in the fight.

"Do not neglect my instructions, amigo," said De Cea in a low tone to Graham.

"Fear nothing," replied the other.

"Come on, Don Ricardo, I am ready for you," cried Don Christobal.

"And I for you, duke," added Don Pompeo to De Cea.

"We will not keep you waiting, señores," replied those addressed.

In another moment all four were engaged.

To any one who could have witnessed the conflict it would have been a curious sight. Graham held his lantern before him so as to throw its light upon his adversary, who awaited his attack with his cloak loosely wrapped round his left arm. It soon became evident that Don Christobal was very expert in the use of the cloak, for he contrived to obstruct all Graham's thrusts with it, and nearly succeeded in flinging it over his antagonist's head.

On his side, Graham, who had been well schooled by De Cea, resorted to many dexterous manœuvres to perplex his opponent. Sometimes, he presented the lantern above his head—then held it in front—anon, after hiding it for a time behind his back, he produced it unexpectedly at the side, dazzling his antagonist with the light.

All this time the combatants were interchanging rapid passes, but as yet neither had sustained any injury.

At length, however, Don Christobal, fatigued with the weight of his cloak, dropped his left arm for a moment to rest it, and his foot becoming entangled in the mantle, he fell just as he was in the act of making a lunge.

Of course he was now entirely at Graham's mercy, but the latter disdained to take advantage of the accident, and allowed him to rise, offering to renew the combat, but this Don Christobal declined.

Meantime, the conflict continued between De Cea and Don Pompeo, and threatened a serious termination, both adversaries being evidently infuriated, when shouts were heard, and a patrol could be seen hurrying to the spot.

"Fly! fly!" cried Don Christobal. "The watch are upon us. We shall all be arrested."

But the combatants were too much excited to heed the warning, and were still furiously engaged, when the patrol, consisting of a dozen men and an officer, all well armed, came up, and rushing between them, beat down their blades.

As not unfrequently happened on such occasions, those who had just been engaged in deadly strife now united together in an attack upon the watch.

In the struggle that ensued, Don Christobal's sword was broken, and being thus rendered defenceless, he was seized by the watch, who attempted to carry him off.

Just at the same moment Don Pompeo was overpowered and disarmed. Both cavaliers called out to their late opponents to rescue them, and they did not call in

vain, for Graham and De Cea threw themselves with such fury on the patrol that the latter were compelled to let go their captives.

All four then took to flight, speeding off in different directions, and, though the patrol attempted pursuit, they did not succeed in making a capture.

III.

HOW GRAHAM AND DE CEA WENT TO THE ESCORIAL.

ALMOST in a state of distraction at the misadventure of the preceding night, Graham repaired, next day, to the Casa Saldana, determined, if possible, to obtain an interview with Casilda. But on his arrival at the casa, he ascertained, to his infinite vexation, that the conde had quitted Madrid at an early hour that morning, taking with him his daughter and her attendant, Rose.

Thus baffled, he sought De Cea. The young duke was as much perplexed as himself, having just discovered by means of his confidential valet, who was accustomed to convey billets to her, that Doña Flor had likewise quitted Madrid early that morning with her husband. The utmost mystery was observed with regard to their movements, no one appearing to know whither they were gone. Little doubt, however, was felt by De Cea that they had accompanied the conde and Casilda. All communication, therefore, was completely cut off between the lovers.

"Your chance is over, I fear, amigo," observed De Cea. "Like your prince, you will be obliged to quit Spain without a wife. By this time, you may depend upon it, the old conde has put it out of your power to trouble him further, by wedding his daughter to Don Christobal."

"But Casilda would never consent to such a step!" cried Graham. "She detests Don Christobal."

"Doña Flor detests Don Pompeo," rejoined De Cea; "but still he is her husband. You must bear the misfortune with philosophy."

"I came to you for aid and comfort in my distress," cried Graham. "But you drive me to despair."

"What would you have me say or do? I cannot give you false hopes. You have lost your mistress. But you have yourself to blame. You ought not to have trusted Rose."

"I see my error now it is too late," rejoined Graham with a groan.

"Well, it will teach you caution, should you ever again be similarly circumstanced," remarked De Cea.

"That is impossible," cried Graham. "I can never love again."

"You think so now, but the wound will soon heal," rejoined De Cea. "I feel very disconsolate myself, but I have not come to the conclusion that Doña Flor is my last love. A ride in the Prado will turn your thoughts into a new channel, and help to cheer you."

Graham assented to the proposition, though he had little hope of relief from it. As they were riding along the Calle de Alcala, they encountered Don Christobal, who was likewise on horseback. He eyed them sternly as they passed him.

"Are you still of the same opinion now?" remarked Graham to the young duke. "Do you believe he is married to Casilda?"

"I know not what to think," replied De Cea. "But I will have him watched."

The surveillance under which Don Christobal was placed by De Cea produced no satisfactory result. The object of it went about just as usual, appeared daily at court, rode in the Prado in the evening, and attended all the entertainments given by the king. But he declined to answer any inquiries as to the Conde de Saldana and his daughter.

Five days thus passed by—five anxious days to Graham—and still he had obtained no tidings whatever of Casilda, and as the period of the prince's departure was close at hand, he began to fear he should quit Spain without beholding her again.

On the afternoon of the sixth day he was alone in his chamber at the palace, brooding upon his griefs, when a damsel, draped in a mantilla, suddenly entered.

Supposing it to be Casilda, he uttered a joyful cry, and started to his feet, but he was quickly undeceived, as the damsel disclosed her features.

"Rose!" he exclaimed, in anger and disappointment. "What brings you here? Are you come to rejoice over the misery you have caused? Be satisfied—your vengeance is complete."

"Think better of me," she rejoined. "I was goaded to what I did by jealousy. Listen to me for a few moments, and then pour all your rage upon me, if you please. Words cannot tell the force of the passion I have felt for you. My love has been utterly unrequited, but the flame, though it had nothing to feed upon but my own heart, did not become extinguished, but burnt fiercely as ever. I tried to smother it, but in vain. You should have pity for me, Sir Richard, for the pangs of jealousy are hard to bear, and mine were intolerable."

"I cannot pity you—I cannot forgive you," said Graham, sternly. "You have wronged me too deeply."

"Hear me out, and then judge me," she rejoined. "To understand my conduct you must place yourself in my position. You must know how fierce and ardent is my nature. Loving you as I did, I could not bear that another should possess you. Regardless of all consequences to myself, to you, and to Doña Casilda, I betrayed your plan, and the elopement was prevented."

"You avow your perfidy, and yet hope for forgiveness!" cried Graham. "Expect it not."

"What made me perfidious? What made me seek

revenge? Love—love for you, Sir Richard—jealousy of Doña Casilda.”

“Well, be content. You have wreaked your vengeance upon us both. Trouble me no more, but depart.”

“A few words more, and I have done. I shall never see you again, Sir Richard, and I therefore desire to set myself right with you. I am not the base, vindictive creature you imagine, but a hapless, loving girl, who has been tortured well-nigh to madness by jealousy. Doña Casilda has forgiven me. Why should not you forgive me?”

“Can you undo the mischief you have done?” cried Graham.

“I can,” she replied. “I have come to tell you so.”

“Is Casilda not wedded to Don Christobal?” demanded Graham.

“She is not—she may still be yours.”

“Heaven be thanked for the intelligence!” cried Graham. “But can I believe you? You have deceived me once.”

“You may trust me now,” she rejoined. “I have repented of my conduct, and am anxious to repair the wrong I have done. I must render justice to Doña Casilda. I thought her incapable of devoted affection to you, but I was mistaken. She has convinced me that she loves you truly. When you learn what has occurred since that unlucky night, you will think so.”

“Speak! I am all attention,” cried Graham.

“Hear me, then, with patience,” said Rose, “and reserve your reproaches till I have done. I own that I told the Conde de Saldana that you were about to carry off his daughter, and I also acquainted Don Christobal and Don Pompeo with the intended elopement. To prevent all possibility of escape, Doña Casilda was locked in her chamber, and I was permitted by the conde to personate her. Within an hour after the fray at the garden gate, the Conde de Saldana, Doña Casilda, and myself, had quitted the casa, and were posting along—none but the conde knew whither.

"Arrived at a small venta, we came to a halt, but did not alight from the carriage in which we travelled, and the cause of our stoppage was presently explained by the arrival of another coach, containing Don Pompeo and Doña Flor. Then we set forward again, but had not proceeded more than half a league, when we were overtaken by a horseman. It was Don Christobal. But he did not accompany us far. Doña Casilda refused to speak to him, and after a brief discourse with the conde, he returned to Madrid. We then pursued our way without further interruption, and early in the morning reached our destination, which proved to be the Escorial."

"The Escorial!" exclaimed Graham. "Is Casilda there? I have sought in vain to discover her retreat."

"She has been at the Escorial ever since that night," rejoined Rose; "but precautions were taken by the conde to baffle your search, and that of the Duke de Cea. As Doña Flor was brought away at the same time by her husband, no communications could be made by her to the young duke. The marriage you dread so much would have taken place ere this, but for Doña Casilda's illness. The excitement she had gone through brought on fever. For two days her life was despaired of—and, indeed, she declared she would prefer death to a union with Don Christobal. Fortunately, no such sad fate awaited her, and I trust she is reserved for happier days. By careful nursing, Doña Flor and myself succeeded in bringing her through the crisis of the fever, and she is now perfectly recovered."

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed Graham, who had listened with deep interest to Rose's narration. "But surely the conde's heart must now be touched, and he will no longer insist upon wedding her to one whom she hates."

"The conde is a slave to his word," replied Rose, "and though bitterly deploring the necessity of the step, he holds himself bound to give his daughter to Don Christobal, unless he shall be released from his promise."

If nothing happens to prevent it, the marriage will take place to-night."

"To-night!" exclaimed Graham. "To-night!"

"Ah, to-night," she repeated. "It was to tell you this that I came here. Had I been able to communicate with you before, I would have done so. But it was impossible. By the conde's order I have never been allowed to quit the palace since we arrived there. This morning, by the aid of Doña Flor, who induced a monk to let me out, I was able to effect my escape, and as I had money enough for the purpose I hired a coach, and drove off at once to Madrid."

"To-night!" exclaimed Graham, bewildered by the intelligence he had received. "You say the marriage is to take place to-night. Where is Don Christobal? He was here—in Madrid—yesterday."

"He may be here still, for aught I know," she replied. "But he will be at the Escorial to-night."

"Unless prevented—unless prevented," cried Graham.

"The marriage will be strictly private," continued Rose. "None will be present at it save Don Pompeo and Doña Flor."

"One not expected may be present," rejoined Graham.

"If you appear I do not think the marriage can take place," said Rose. "But now I have fulfilled my errand. I have told you all I had to say. Do you forgive me?"

"From my heart," he rejoined.

"Enough! that is all I ask. May you be successful, Sir Richard! May you overcome all difficulties, and win your bride! And when you *have* won her, may you be happy with her!"

"Will you go with me to the Escorial, Rose? You may be of use?"

"No, my task is over. We must never meet again, Sir Richard—never! I have mastered my feelings, but I could not trust myself near you."

"Perhaps it is better so," sighed Graham. "Farewell, Rose. Take this purse, I entreat you."

"I take it, because I need money to return to France. Farewell for ever, Sir Richard! Think sometimes upon one whose fault has been that she loved you too well! Think of her, and pity her!"

Without waiting for a reply, she quitted the room.

Graham's first business was to seek the Duke de Cea, to whom he imparted what Rose had told him.

After some minutes' reflection, de Cea said :

"Well, you may as well make up your mind to it. Doña Casilda will be married to-night."

"But I cannot make up my mind to it," cried Graham. "I will stay the marriage."

"You cannot stay it. It is written in the book of fate."

"A truce to this jesting! It is ill timed," cried Graham, angrily. "Will you assist me?—will you accompany me to the Escorial?"

"I will," replied De Cea. "But I am not jesting when I assert that Casilda will be wedded to-night; but I do not say she will be wedded to Don Christobal."

"Ha! I see—but do you think that possible?"

"I think it certain, or I would not hold out the hope. Casilda shall be yours to-night."

"Oh, my dear friend!" exclaimed Graham, joyfully, "you raise me from despair. You make me the happiest of men."

"Calm yourself, amigo. A good deal has to be done before the object can be accomplished, and you are not in a fit state to undertake it. Indeed, if you meddle in the matter it will fail—as certainly as the late attempt at elopement failed. Leave the affair to me, and I will answer for the result.

"I put myself in your hands. You shall have the entire management of the business," said Graham. "But let us start for the Escorial at once."

"I shall not be ready for an hour," said De Cea, with provoking calmness.

"Not for an hour!" cried Graham, impatiently. "I cannot wait so long."

"You had better wait than lose Casilda."

"Well, well—I will do anything you enjoin," said Graham.

"My injunctions then are, that you amuse yourself in the best way you can for an hour, and then return to me. It is now four o'clock. At five I shall expect you."

"At five to a moment I will be here," said Graham.

"Do not trouble yourself further about Don Christobal. You will mar my project if you at all interfere."

"I resign myself entirely to your guidance. I will not even question you further."

"Good! then we shall succeed. Au revoir!"

Graham returned at the appointed time, and found De Cea ready for departure.

Shortly afterwards, the two young men, mounted on fleet Andalusian horses, and followed by half a dozen lacqueys in De Cea's superb livery, had passed through the Puerta de Segovia, and were galloping along the valley of the Manzanares.

Ere long they entered upon an arid waste, which seemed to grow more dreary and desolate as they advanced. Burnt to a dark red crust by the scorching sun, the ground was strewn with enormous granite boulders. With the exception of an occasional solitary venta, not a single habitation was to be seen on the road.

The savage region was bounded on the right by the lofty ranges of the Guadarrama, and it was towards the foot of this mountainous barrier that the horsemen were riding.

Nearer and nearer they approached the mountains, and after half an hour's gradual ascent reached a higher elevation, whence the whole of the stony region they had tracked could be discerned.

But the country here was just as stern and savage as they had just quitted. Nothing showed that they were near one of the grandest palaces in Spain; there were no noble domains, no woods, no park, no circling wall. All was waste as before—parched, tawny ground, covered

with rocks, and rugged picturesque mountains towering in front, and seeming to check farther progress in that direction.

But the cavaliers had now nearly accomplished their rapid journey. A lofty crucifix, planted on the summit of a huge rounded grey boulder, and from the singularity of its position producing a most striking effect, told them they had reached the precincts of the wondrous convent-palace reared by Philip II.

Not far from the crucifix, which was regarded with becoming reverence by De Cea and the lacqueys, there was a large elaborately-wrought iron gateway, adorned with the arms of Castile and Aragon. Passing through it, and entering a sort of park, the horsemen rode on, and presently reached an eminence, whence a stupendous granite pile burst upon their gaze. The numerous gilded vanes, the lofty quadrangular towers, the steep sloping roofs, and grand central cupola of the mighty edifice—then, and indeed now, the largest structure in Spain—were lighted up by the beams of the setting sun. But the lower parts of the structure looked stern and sombre as the rugged mountains by which it was surrounded: and ere Graham had gazed at it for a few minutes, the radiance had disappeared, and left the whole mass gloomy and grey.

Shortly afterwards they dismounted, and consigning the horses to the lacqueys, who proceeded with them to the royal stables, the two young men walked towards the principal entrance of the palace. Above the noble gateway were carved the royal arms of Spain, and above this vast stone escutcheon, in a niche, was set a statue of San Lorenzo, holding the instrument of his martyrdom in one hand, and a book in the other. Two gridirons were also sculptured in bold relief over the doorway.

The monastic character of the edifice was proclaimed to Graham by the numerous friars who were seen crossing it, or pacing to and fro along the cloisters.

But De Cea did not loiter in the court, but proceeded at once to the church.

IV.

THE TOURNAMENT WITH CANES.

DESIROUS to show his royal guest as much honour on his departure as he had done on his arrival, Philip commanded a fresh series of festivities, which lasted without interruption for five days.

The concluding pageant, designed to eclipse all the previous shows in splendour, was a tournament with canes—an exhibition, borrowed from the Moors, in which the Spanish chivalry delighted. Accordingly, lists were prepared in the principal court of the palace.

All the windows and balconies overlooking the court were decorated with tapestry and costly stuffs, and gorgeous canopies, embroidered with the royal arms, and adorned with curtains of cloth of gold and silver, were prepared for the queen and the Infanta, and all the principal ladies of the court.

When these windows and balconies were occupied by cavaliers and dames in their richest apparel, when the queen and the Infanta, or as she was now styled, the Princess of England, took their seats beneath the canopy designed for them, nothing could be more brilliant than the scene. The whole of the space outside the lists were filled with cavaliers in magnificent liveries, and the eye ranged over a forest of nodding plumes of various hues.

As usual, the Infanta was attired in white satin, and her sole ornaments were pearls; but she looked pale, and traces of anxiety were visible in her countenance. It was noticed also by the meninas who stood behind her, and by others who had an opportunity of closely watching her, that she took little interest in the spectacle.

The queen, however, appeared very lively, and seemed

delighted with the show. She was magnificently dressed in silver brocade, and glittered with diamonds. Charles, who occupied a chair between her majesty and the Infanta, was attired in white satin, with black and white plumes in his hat. He wore the Order of the Garter, suspended by a broad blue riband from his neck, and the enamelled Garter round his knee. Like the Infanta, he looked grave and sad.

When all the company had assembled, as we have related, a band of trumpets, drums, kettle-drums, and clarions, rode into the arena, making the court ring with their stirring strains. The men wore cassocks, embroidered with the royal arms, and were mounted on splendidly caparisoned horses.

After them followed the king's chief equerry, all his majesty's riders and pages in carnation-coloured satin, walking uncovered before a superbly equipped charger, intended for the king's use in the tournament. On either side of the steed, which looked proud of its magnificent trappings, walked two grooms of the stable, and behind followed as many farriers, carrying pouches of crimson velvet. Then came a troop of fifty cavaliers resplendent in the royal livery, mounted on bright bay horses, trapped in black and white velvet, with white bridles and silver musrols. The horses were covered with crimson velvet horse-cloths, embroidered with the king's name and the royal arms. The troop was followed by forty youths attached to the royal stables, gallantly attired in doublets of carnation taffeta, and carrying the king's mounting-steps, which were made of ebony, covered with carnation taffeta fringed with gold.

Then came twelve mules of the largest size, each led by a couple of grooms, and sumptuously caparisoned in crimson velvet, embroidered with the royal arms, having silver bridles, silver bits, and silver poutrels, while their heads were adorned with lofty carnation and black plumes, striped with silver. These mules made a most gallant show, and formed the most curious part of the procession, as they were laden with bundles of canes,

tipped with blunt iron points, intended to be used in the approaching skirmish.

Then followed four more trumpeters, doing their devoir, and after them came riders, grooms, and pages, in the livery of the Conde de Olivarez, conducting the steed belonging to his excellency, which was superbly trapped for the occasion. Then came a troop of fifty horsemen, all clad in the Conde-Duque's livery, and carrying white targets with white bandels.

Next came another squadron, headed by the Admiral of Castile, and apparelled in his livery of black satin guarded with gold lace. These cavaliers carried black targets with devices of gold.

A fourth squadron followed, arrayed in white satin laced and flowered with silver, and carrying silver bucklers. These were headed by the Conde de Monterey.

Two other troops succeeded, clad in the liveries of their leaders, and provided with bucklers having various devices. These were respectively commanded by Don Pedro de Toledo and the Duke de Sessa.

All these squadrons drew up in the first instance in the centre of the arena, and remained there until the king came forth from a pavilion placed at the extremity of the lists.

His majesty was attired in a riding suit of black taffeta, which became him well, and wore black and white plumes in his hat. He was accompanied by the Infante Don Carlos, who wore habiliments similar to those of his majesty, and by the Conde de Olivarez, who was attired in orange-tawny velvet.

As soon as Philip came forth, the grooms led his charger towards him, the steps were placed, and his majesty, who needed little help, was ceremoniously assisted to mount by the Conde de Olivarez.

On gaining the saddle, the king bowed graciously in reply to the acclamations of the assemblage, and then rode towards the centre of the arena, whither he was followed by Don Carlos and Olivarez, as soon as they had mounted their steeds.

Meanwhile, canes had been distributed among the horsemen, and one of these slender javelins, light as a reed, together with a buckler, were delivered to his majesty by his equerry. On coming up, Don Carlos and Olivarez were similarly armed.

All being then in readiness, the trumpets sounded, and three squadrons wheeling round with great quickness, the king put himself at their head, and galloped with them to the upper extremity of the arena, where they faced about and stood still.

Simultaneously, a corresponding movement was executed with equal skill and rapidity by the three other squadrons, under the command of Olivarez. These posted themselves at the opposite end of the arena, facing the king's troops.

Again the trumpets sounded, and upon the instant the king and Olivarez rode against each other with extraordinary swiftness. Bending over their horses' necks like Moslems, they met in mid-career, shivering their javelins against each other's bucklers.

Ere turning, fresh lances were furnished them, and as they met again, Philip rose suddenly in his saddle, and delivered a downward thrust, which Olivarez caught upon his target.

In the third encounter they hurled their canes against each other, and the king's aim being the best, he was adjudged the victor. Great applause followed this chivalrous feat, which was admirably performed.

Other courses were then run between Don Carlos and the Marquis de Carpio, the Admiral of Castile and Don Pedro de Toledo, and the Duke de Sessa and the Conde de Monterey. No disaster occurred, and the prowess of the champions elicited loud applause.

These encounters between the leaders having come to an end, the opposing troops prepared for the grand mêlée. The squadrons on either side extended so as to form two lines, and this was no sooner done than the trumpets sounded a charge.

Holding aloft their slender javelins, striking spurs

in their steeds, and shouting furiously, the opposing hosts, respectively led by the king and Olivarez, dashed against each other, producing all the effect of a battle charge. The ground quaked beneath the horses' feet. The shock when they met was terrible, and the splintering of the canes sounded like the crackling of trees. Several cavaliers were unhorsed, but none were much hurt, and all were quickly in the saddle again.

Fresh lances being speedily furnished to the horsemen, another charge took place, and amid a tremendous crackling of canes a dozen or more warriors rolled in the dust. As almost all of these owed Olivarez for leader, shouts were raised for the king.

As soon as the horsemen were in a condition to renew the conflict, they were arrayed against each other by their leaders, and a third charge was made. But this time a skilful manœuvre was executed by Olivarez. As the opposing force rushed against him, he opened his lines and let them pass through, and then, turning quickly, attacked them in the rear, and put them to flight, pursuing them round the arena.

This flight and pursuit constituted the most exciting part of the spectacle, inasmuch as it not only gave the cavaliers an opportunity of displaying their horsemanship, but occasioned a great number of single combats, which were conducted with wonderful spirit.

In the end, Philip succeeded in rallying his scattered troops, and made a final charge against his opponent. The advantage he thus gained was so decisive, that by the general voice he was proclaimed the victor, and shouts resounded on all sides of "Viva el Rey! Dios guarde al Rey!"

The trumpets again sounded, the squadrons re-formed with wonderful quickness, and then quitted the arena, under the command of their respective leaders, in as perfect order as if no engagement had taken place.

Philip and Olivarez remained to the last, and as his majesty rode out of the arena, the acclamations of the beholders were renewed. Having dismounted, the king

repaired to the royal canopy, where he received the congratulations of Charles, who had been greatly delighted with the spectacle.

The royal party then adjourned to the palace. An hour later a sumptuous banquet was served, at which all the principal lords and ladies of the court sat down. After the banquet, the grand suite of apartments were thrown open, and a ball concluded the festivities of the day.

End of the Sixth Book.

BOOK VII.—THE ESCORIAL.

I.

THE CHURCH OF THE ESCORIAL.

THE royal edifice of San Lorenzo of the Escorial, to which we must now return, cost its "holy founder," as Philip II. was termed by the grateful monks whom he lodged there, upwards of six millions of ducats in construction and embellishment. Its design originated in a vow made by Philip after the battle of Saint Quentin to erect a monastery and dedicate it to San Lorenzo, in place of one which his majesty had destroyed while bombarding the city.

The conventual palace was laid out in the form of a gridiron—the implement of torture used for the martyrdom of San Lorenzo, who, as is well known, was grilled alive.

Commenced in 1563 by Juan Bautista de Toledo, the gigantic pile, which was built of granite obtained from the neighbouring sierra, was not completed until twenty-one years later, by the celebrated Juan de Herrera. In-

deed, it was not till nearly the close of the century that the work was absolutely ended.

From a seat hewn in the rock, amid a chesnut grove on the side of the mountain overlooking the spot, Philip watched the progress of his vast design. The rocky bench occupied by the moody monarch still exists, and is known as *La Silla de Rey*.

The Escorial comprehended a palace, a convent, a church, and a royal mausoleum. In the *Podridero*, or royal vault, at the period of our history reposed three kings. In this splendid sepulchre the Emperor Charles V., Philip II., Philip III., and their wives and their descendants, have subsequently been laid.

The convent, which formed a considerable part of the vast structure, and which was endowed by its founder with a revenue of forty thousand crowns, was occupied by Hieronomite friars. An austere character pervaded the entire structure. There were an extraordinary number of apartments, many of them adorned with rare paintings and sculptures, but they were all gloomy. The magnificent library formed at the Escorial by Philip was removed to Madrid by his successor.

In planning the convent-palace it was the desire of its founder to build it of unsurpassable size and grandeur, and of such solid material that it should endure for ages. So far he succeeded, for the edifice still exists in all its primitive majesty. But he has stamped his own character upon the pile, and the gloom which it wore in his days hangs over it still. The monks are gone—their revenues have been confiscated—but the Escorial is sadder and more sombre without them.

All the choicest paintings that adorned its chambers are gone too, and those that are left only speak of the glories of the past. Such was Philip's attachment to the structure, that, with his dying breath, he charged his son, as he would prosper, to take care of the Escorial.

By the Spaniards the mighty edifice is denominated the Eighth Wonder of the World.

And now let us rejoin the Duke de Cea and Graham, whom we left approaching the church.

On setting foot on the black and white marble pavement of the nave, Graham was awe-stricken by the grandeur and solemnity of the fane.

But though he admired the severe simplicity of its design—though he was charmed by the vaulted roof, in the midst of which rose the dome—though he noted the numerous shrines, at all of which tapers were burning, lighting up the magnificent pictures and exquisite statues with which the walls were adorned—his attention soon became riveted by the high altar, the wonders of which were fully revealed by an immense silver chandelier, suspended from the superbly-painted roof. By the light of this splendid lamp, which was kept ever burning, he could discern the superb altar-screen, approached by nineteen marble steps, the exquisite columns of agate and jasper, the marvellous paintings, the gilt statues, and, above all, the magnificent tabernacle of gilt bronze, which it took seven years to fabricate.

But the objects that struck him most, and, indeed, startled him by their life-like effect, were the kneeling figures of gilt bronze ranged in the arcades on either side of the altar. The statues on the right were those of Philip II. with three of his wives—Queen Mary of England being omitted—and his unhappy son, Don Carlos. Those on the left were the Emperor Charles V., his wife Elisabeth, his daughter the Empress Maria, and his sisters Eleanora and Maria.

“Nothing can be finer than those bronze statues,” he remarked, in a low tone, to De Cea.

“They are magnificent,” replied the other. “One might easily cheat oneself into the belief that they are living persons engaged in prayer.”

“For a moment I thought so,” said Graham.

“Examine them more closely, and you will see with what accuracy the minutest detail of the costume is given,” said De Cea. “The blazonry on the mantles of the two monarchs is admirable, as you can perceive even

from this distance. In the Podridero, which lies beneath the high altar, rest all the personages you see there represented. Note, I pray you, the oratory on the right of the altar. In that small chamber Philip II. passed his latest hours. Through yon little window, without quitting his couch, he could see the high altar, hear mass performed, and assist at the holy rites. There he breathed his last."

With noiseless footsteps Graham then moved towards the altar, and became so enthralled, that for some minutes he was not aware that De Cea had left him. Though somewhat surprised at his friend's disappearance, he continued his investigation of the marvels of the church, visiting the choir, the sacristy, the Pantheon, the Podridero, and the little chamber in which Philip died. And it was well there was so much to occupy his attention, for more than an hour elapsed before De Cea reappeared.

He was accompanied by Don Antonio Guino, and his looks gave augury of success.

"All goes well," he said. "I have seen Doña Flor. She will assist us."

"But what of Don Christobal?" said Graham.

"Neither he nor Don Pompeo can interfere with us. They are both detained in Madrid," replied De Cea.

"Amazement!" exclaimed Graham. "How has this been effected?"

"Come this way, and you shall learn," replied De Cea, leading him into an aisle on the right, whither they were followed by Don Antonio.

"Now you shall hear what I have done to serve you," said De Cea. "During the interval between your visit to me and our departure, I caused inquiries to be made at Don Christobal's house, and ascertained that both he and Don Pompeo were in Madrid, but that their horses were ordered for six o'clock, at which hour they intended to set out for the Escorial. On learning this, I immediately flew to Olivarez, and obtained an order from

him enjoining their attendance upon the king at the palace this evening, at nine o'clock. The order could not be disobeyed. I gave it to Don Antonio, who undertook to deliver it, and then to follow me to the Escorial. This done, I set out tranquilly with you. Don Antonio will now tell you how the order was executed."

"It was a laughable scene," replied Don Antonio. "I waited to the last moment, and just as the two caballeros had mounted their horses and were about to depart, I rode up and delivered the order. You may imagine their rage and consternation. Don Pompeo swore terribly, but Don Christobal said little. However, there was nothing for it but obedience. They both dismounted, and Don Christobal called to one of his lacqueys, and bade him prepare to start instantly for the Escorial. 'I am going to the Escorial, señor,' I said, 'and will convey any message you may desire to send.' 'You will do me a great favour, señor, if you will deliver this ring to the Conde de Saldana,' he replied. 'He is at the palace—you will easily find him. 'Ere two hours he shall have the ring, señor,' I replied. 'What are you about to do?' cried Don Pompeo. 'If you send that token, all will be at an end.' 'It is useless to pursue the matter further,' rejoined Don Christobal. 'Fate is against me. I had come to the fixed determination that the marriage should take place to-night, or not at all. There is now an end of the affair.' 'But the marriage may take place to-morrow,' urged Don Pompeo. 'No, let her wed Don Ricardo, if she will. I have done with her,' rejoined Don Christobal. 'Deliver the ring to the conde, señor,' he added to me. 'It shall be done without fail,' I returned. 'Have you any other message, señor?' 'None,' he replied. 'The conde will understand its import.' On this I left them, and galloped off to the Escorial. And here I am."

"Have you got the ring?" cried Graham.

"Here it is," replied Don Antonio. "But I cannot give it you. I have promised to deliver it to the Conde de Saldana."

"You shall deliver it to him," said De Cea. "Now come with me."

And they all three quitted the church, and entered the palace.

II.

THE RING.

ON that same evening, in a large apartment in the palace were assembled the Conde de Saldana, Doña Calsilda, and Doña Flor. The chamber, though well lighted and richly furnished, looked sombre, as did all the rooms in the Escorial.

For some time previously the conde had been in a state of great irritation and anxiety, but as he did not expect much sympathy from his daughters, he strove to control his feelings, and contented himself with expressing his extreme surprise at the non-appearance of Don Christobal and Don Pompeo.

Though his daughters could have easily set his mind at rest on that score, they did not care to give him any information—and, indeed, took no notice of his impatience.

Just at nine o'clock the door opened, and an aged monk, clad in the dark robes of the order of San Geronimo, and whose venerable appearance was heightened by a long grey beard, entered the room.

He saluted the party, and after looking round with surprise, he remarked:

"All is prepared for the marriage. But where is the bridegroom?"

"I fear the marriage cannot take place to-night, as arranged, good father," replied the conde. "I do not know what has happened to Don Christobal. He and Don Pompeo ought to have been here an hour ago."

"I only waited Padre Benito's arrival to acquaint

you with the truth, father," said Doña Flor. "They are detained in Madrid by an order from the minister."

"What do I hear?" exclaimed the conde. "Don Christobal and Don Pompeo detained by Olivarez! Why did you not tell me this before?"

"Because I begged her to remain silent, father," interposed Casilda. "Because I hoped and believed that Padre Benito, whose heart I know to be filled with kindness and compassion, would aid me in my efforts to induce you to forego this hateful marriage. A few words from your lips," she added to the friar, "will move my father, and make him change his purpose, even at the latest moment. Do not let me be sacrificed."

"Sacrificed! daughter," exclaimed the friar.

"If I am wedded to Don Christobal, I shall be made miserable for life," cried Casilda. "Oh! save me, holy father! save me!"

"My heart is indeed touched by your entreaties, daughter," said Padre Benito, "and I would gladly preserve you from the misery you anticipate. Oh, noble conde, let me add my supplications to those of your child. Reflect, while there is yet time. Do not let this irretrievable step be taken."

"Cease these entreaties, good father," replied the conde. "I cannot listen to them. I have given my promise to Don Christobal, and unless he releases me, the marriage must take place."

"I grieve to hear it," said the friar. "But Don Christobal may be moved."

"He is inflexible," rejoined the conde.

"Hear me, good father," said Casilda to the friar. "My heart is given to another. The conde knows it, and yet he will force me into this hateful match."

"I cannot help it," cried Saldana, in a voice of anguish. "Heaven knows I do not desire to make you miserable, my child! Heaven knows I would willingly give you to Don Ricardo, whom I love as a son! But I am bound by chains that cannot be sundered."

"Can nothing be done to avert this dire calamity?" said Padre Benito.

"Nothing!—nothing!" groaned the conde.

"Yes, yes, all can be set right," cried Doña Flor. "Come in! come in!" she added, opening a side-door, and giving admittance to Graham and the two others.

An irrepressible cry of delight burst from Casilda, and regardless of her father's presence, she flew towards her lover, who caught her in his arms.

For a few moments surprise kept the old conde silent, and Padre Benito made no remark, though he was too shrewd not to comprehend how matters stood.

"You will not mar their happiness, noble conde?" he said, at length.

"What am I to do?" groaned Saldana. "Don Christobal will not release me from my promise. I besought him to do so when we last met, but he refused."

"His absence bespeaks that he has abandoned the marriage," remarked Padre Benito.

"I should think so, if he had sent me any token," said the conde. "But I have received none."

"I have a token from Don Christobal," said Don Antonio. "Three hours ago I left him in Madrid, and he desired me to give you this ring, saying you would understand its import."

"I do! I do!" exclaimed Saldana, joyfully. "This ring releases me from my promise."

"Then you are free to bestow your daughter on Don Ricardo, señor conde," said De Cea. "Come forward, he added to Graham and Casilda, "and let him join your hands and give you his benediction."

"Their hands shall be joined at the altar, and that without delay," said the conde, embracing them. "Luckily all is prepared."

"And the bridegroom has been found," said Padre Benito.

"And Don Christobal himself has sent the wedding ring," added De Cea.

"Stay! I have something to say before we proceed to the chapel," cried the conde. "Sir Richard Graham, I know you love my daughter. I give her to you. But we have not yet spoken of her wedding portion."

"Oh! señor conde, heed not that!" cried Graham.

"Pardon me, amigo, the matter is really important, and ought to be arranged," interposed De Cea.

"It *shall* be arranged," rejoined the conde. "You know I never break my word, Sir Richard."

"I have good reason to know it, señor conde," he replied.

"Well, then, Casilda will bring you the same dower she would have brought Don Christobal."

"Nobly done!" cried De Cea; while Casilda threw her arms about her father's neck.

"I thank you from my heart, señor conde," said Graham; "but I should have been well content with Casilda without a wedding portion."

"That's all very well," whispered De Cea. "But it is much better as it is. And now that all is settled, señor conde," he added aloud, "let us proceed to the chapel."

"With all my heart," replied Saldana.

Attendants were then summoned, and the door being thrown open, the conde gave his hand to Casilda, and the whole party proceeded to the chapel.

"I congratulate you heartily, amigo," said De Cea to Graham, as they took their way along the corridor. "You have got a charming bride and a splendid wedding portion. Though the prince may fail, you at least have succeeded in making a capital Spanish Match."

III.

ROYAL PRESENTS.

THE last day that Charles had to spend in Madrid had now arrived, and he was conferring about his departure with Buckingham and Lord Kensington, when he received a visit from the Marquis de Avila, the king's principal rider.

The marquis, who was a very important-looking personage, came attended by four officers of the household, bearing presents for the prince.

"I am sent by the king to offer these gifts to your highness, as a mark of his majesty's brotherly love," said Avila. "This pistol with the sword and dagger, set with diamonds, belonged to his majesty's illustrious grand-sire, Philip II. With these cross-bows the Duke de Medina-Sidonia served his majesty. This pistol belonged to the Duke de Ossuna. These rapiers, of the finest workmanship of Toledo, were forged for the king himself, and have been used by his majesty. It is not on account of their value that his majesty begs your highness's acceptance of these weapons, but he conceives they may have some interest in your eyes."

"Gifts more acceptable could not possibly have been bestowed upon me," replied Charles. "I pray you tell his majesty so."

"I have more to offer on the part of his majesty," pursued Avila. "The king has sent your highness eighteen Spanish jennets, six Barbary horses of the purest race, as many mares, and twenty foals."

"And let me add, for I have seen them," said Archie, who had entered at the same time as the marquis, "that all these jennets, Barbary horses, mares, and foals, are covered with mantles of crimson velvet, guarded with gold lace, and embroidered with the royal arms."

"I cannot thank his majesty sufficiently," said Charles. "Wear this, I pray you, marquis, as a token of my regard," he added, presenting him with a splendid diamond ring.

Avila bowed profoundly, placed the glittering gem upon his finger, and then, turning to Buckingham, said:

"His majesty sends your grace this diamond girdle."

"'Tis superb!" exclaimed Buckingham, enraptured.

"It is estimated at fifty thousand crowns, your grace," said Avila.

Buckingham detached a magnificent diamond clasp from his hat, and presented it to the marquis.

"Nay, my lord, this is too rich a gift," said Avila. "'Tis as valuable as the girdle."

"Keep it, I pray you," rejoined Buckingham.

Avila bowed profoundly.

"To you, my lord of Kensington," he said, "his majesty sends four Spanish horses and two hundred diamond buttons, as a mark of his regard."

"I fear I am forgotten," remarked Archie. "Tell his majesty I am beholden for what he has *not* sent."

"Thou art mistaken, gossip," rejoined Avila. "Thou wilt not go away empty handed. The king sends thee the largest donkey to be found in his dominions!"

"I humbly thank his majesty," replied Archie. "The animal will remind me of—I won't say whom. I have no diamond rings or brooches to bestow upon your lordship, and you won't deign, I suppose, to accept this bauble."

In the course of the morning other presents were received by the prince. The queen sent him fifty skins of amber, and other costly perfumes. A casket filled with jewels was sent by the Infanta; and several paintings by the first masters, which had excited his admiration, were presented to him by Olivarez.

Charles made presents in return of equal magnificence, which were delivered by Lord Kensington.

To the king he sent a superb sword, the handle and scabbard of which were garnished with priceless gems.

To the Infante Don Carlos he gave a ring containing a diamond of inestimable value set in a cup. To the Cardinal Infante Don Fernando he gave a pectoral of topazes and diamonds, having a large pendent pearl of the purest water. And to the Conde de Olivarez he gave a great diamond of eight carats, with a splendid pear-shaped pearl attached to it.

Other jewels were also presented by him to the Duke del Infantado, the Admiral of Castile and Leon and the Conde de Puebla.

As faithful chroniclers, we are also bound to record that before leaving Madrid, the prince bestowed rich gifts upon all the gentlemen of the chamber and the king's pages. Moreover, he gratified the royal archers with four thousand crowns.

IV.

HOW CHARLES TOOK LEAVE OF THE INFANTA.

AN hour before noon Charles, accompanied by Buckingham, and attended by Bristol, Sir Walter Aston, Lord Kensington, and other English nobles, proceeded to the king's chapel in the palace, where he found Philip, the Infantes Don Carlos and Don Fernando, Olivarez, and the state council.

At the altar stood the Patriarch of the Indies.

Kneeling before this high ecclesiastical dignitary, Philip and Charles solemnly swore to observe the terms of the matrimonial treaty entered into between them.

The oath taken, they arose.

Turning towards the assemblage, Charles then delivered a sealed packet to Bristol, saying, as he gave it,

"This packet contains the procuration empowering his majesty the king, or his Highness the Infante Don Carlos,

to marry the Lady Infanta Maria in my name. On the arrival of the Pope's dispensation, your lordship will deliver the proxy to the king."

"It shall be done as your highness directs," rejoined Bristol.

"On my part," said Philip, addressing the assemblage, "I undertake to act as proxy for his highness the prince. And I further engage that the marriage shall take place before Christmas, at the latest."

This ceremony over, Charles returned to his own apartments in the palace, and for the next two hours his time was fully occupied in receiving the various important personages who came to take formal leave of him.

Chief among these were the Papal Nuncio, the ambassadors of Germany and Venice, the corregidor of Madrid, the Conde de Gondomar, the members of the different councils, and the principal grandees of the court.

In bidding them adieu, Charles thanked them in cordial and gracious terms for their attention to him during his prolonged stay in Madrid. To each member of the state council, and to the corregidor, he presented a superb diamond ring.

Attended by several of his suite, Charles then repaired to the queen's apartments, for the purpose of taking formal leave of her majesty and the Infanta. He found them in a magnificent salon, surrounded by the principal ladies of the court, and attended by a host of gaily-attired pages and meninas.

The leave-taking was conducted with all the rigid formality of Spanish etiquette. The conversation chiefly turned upon the presents made to the two illustrious ladies by the prince. To the queen he gave a magnificent diamond of twenty carats, a triangle of brilliants, and earrings, each having a diamond as large as a bean. Her majesty, who was passionately fond of jewels, was enraptured with the gifts.

To the Countess Olivarez he gave a cross of large

diamonds, and to the Duchess de Gandia and the Countess de Lemos, the queen's principal ladies, he gave similar ornaments.

To the Infanta he gave a necklace of two hundred and fifty large pear-shaped pearls, a collar of great balass rubies, with knots of pearls, and two sets of pearl earrings of incalculable value.

"Do you like those pearls, Maria?" he said to her, in a low voice. "They are the choicest of the king my father's gems."

"They are beautiful—most beautiful," she replied, in the same tone. "But I fear I shall never wear them."

The presentiment proved correct. The gems were subsequently returned to the prince.

As Charles took leave of the Infanta, in the cold and stately fashion prescribed by etiquette, he had much ado to maintain his firmness, and she had equal difficulty in repressing her emotion. Her hand trembled, and her lips and cheeks were bloodless.

"Farewell, Maria!" he said.

"Adios, prince!" she murmured.

Fixing upon her a look she never forgot, and which quite as eloquently as words proclaimed the anguish of his heart, Charles quitted the salon with his attendants.

When he was gone, the Infanta's strength quite forsok her, and she swooned away.

V.

WHEREIN IS RECOUNTED BY AN EXALTED PERSONAGE A LONG-
PROMISED LEGEND.

IN the evening, a farewell fête was given to the prince by the Earl of Bristol.

The entertainment was of the most splendid description, and all the royal family, with the exception of the Infanta, who was slightly indisposed, honoured it with their presence. The principal salon was converted into a ball-room for the occasion, and here those devoted to the dance remained; but the evening being magnificent, many of the guests preferred wandering about the illuminated gardens.

Among those were the king and the royal party. After a few turns on the terrace, they seated themselves at the farther end of the lawn, where they were sufficiently removed from the sounds of revelry. Charles was with them, of course. Indeed, he and the king had been inseparable during the evening.

"This garden is very charming," remarked the queen.

"I thought it so when I first arrived at Madrid," replied Charles. "But since I have seen the gardens of the Buen Retiro, it appears insignificant."

"How comes the house to be so strangely designated?" she inquired.

"I am unable to inform your majesty," he replied. "Lord Bristol told me there was a legend attached to it, but he has never related it to me."

"I have heard the story, and will tell it you," said Philip. "It is a sort of family legend, for my grandsire is connected with it."

The Legend of the House of Seven Chimneys.

"You must know, then," began the king, "that this house, which has obtained a designation so singular, was built about fifty years ago by the Marquis de Xavalquinto, in the time of Philip II. Now the marquis was a very mysterious personage, and had even the reputation of being a magician, being addicted, it was said, to unlawful studies.

"In consequence of these rumours he was cited to appear before the Holy Inquisition, but nothing could be proved against him, and he was liberated. At the same time, certain papers found in his possession, and covered with cabalistic figures, which no one could understand, were ordered to be burnt. An odd circumstance then occurred. A small piece of parchment escaped the flames—indeed, it was the opinion of the official employed to destroy these writings that it would not burn. Be this as it may, it was quite certain that while the rest of the papers were consumed, this parchment remained untouched. Upon it were written several sentences, but in a character which the official could not decipher.

"Instead of delivering the parchment to the chief inquisitor, as was his duty, the knave kept it in his own possession, but he was speedily punished, for he fell grievously sick, and, when dying, told the priest who attended him what he had done, and gave him the paper. The priest did not entirely believe in the baneful influence of the parchment, but deeming it right to obey the injunctions of the dying man, he delivered the mysterious scroll to the grand inquisitor. It chanced that on that very day the inquisitor had an audience with the king, so, taking the parchment with him, he showed it to his majesty, telling him what had occurred.

"Philip regarded it with religious horror, but he at once perceived that the characters were Arabian, and sent for a person learned in that language to interpret them. When the scroll was shown to this man, he

turned pale and trembled, but refused to communicate what he had found out to any other ear than that of his majesty. Upon this, Philip dismissed his attendants, and heard what the man had to say in private.

"Next day, without mentioning his design, Philip, accompanied by two attendants, went to Xavalquinto's mansion, and was very ceremoniously received by the old marquis, who humbly desired to know what had procured him the honour of a visit from his majesty.

"'You shall know that presently, my lord,' replied Philip, sternly. 'Meantime, I wish to see the garden.'

"'Your majesty has only to command,' replied Xavalquinto.

"And he then conducted the king to the garden. Without bestowing a regard at any object, Philip selected a spot whence he could obtain a good view of the house. Very possibly he stationed himself where we are now seated. After examining the structure for a few minutes, he said to Xavalquinto, fixing a searching glance upon him as he spoke,

"'How many chimneys has your house, my lord?'

"'Six, sire,' replied the marquis, surprised at the question.

"'There ought to be seven,' said the king. 'Let another be built without delay.'

"'But, sire, another chimney will spoil the symmetry of the building,' remonstrated Xavalquinto.

"'No matter. I will have it done,' rejoined Philip, peremptorily.

"'I would rather your majesty would order me to pull down the mansion than so to disfigure it,' said Xavalquinto.

"'It will not be disfigured,' said Philip. 'Pull down that belvidere, and build the seventh chimney in its place.'

"'Sire, that belvidere is my place of study—where I pursue my scientific labours—whence I consult the stars. Do not, I conjure you, compel me to destroy it.

My fate is linked with that belvidere. If it falls, I shall fall.'

" 'How know you that?' asked the king, sternly.

" 'The stars have told me so, sire.'

" 'Tut! this is idle,' rejoined Philip. 'You have some other reason for refusing to obey me. But since you hesitate, I myself will do the work. I will build the seventh chimney.'

" 'Will nothing turn you from your purpose, sire?'

" 'Nothing,' replied the king. 'I am as inexorable as Satan would be to his bond slave.'

" Xavalquinto shook from head to foot at this observation, but partially recovering himself, he said:

" 'You have sealed my doom, sire. But leave the task to me. I ask no further favour. If your majesty will come again to-morrow, you will find the work done.'

" 'If you can complete it in so short a time, you must have quicker workmen than mine,' said the king. 'But let it be so. I will return at this hour to-morrow and see what progress you have made. Till the work is done, you must remain a prisoner in your own house.'

" Xavalquinto bowed, and the king departed.

" When his majesty came again on the following day, he found the household of the marquis in great consternation. During the night strange noises had been heard, but no one got up to see what was the matter. In the morning the cause of these nocturnal disturbances was apparent. In the principal salon on the ground floor, in that very room, in fact, where dancing is now going on, a panel had been removed, disclosing a fireplace, the existence of which no one had suspected.

" Philip immediately went to look at it, and after satisfying himself of the correctness of the information, he turned to the intendant, who accompanied him, and asked for the marquis.

" The marquis was gone.

" 'Gone!' exclaimed the king, angrily. 'He has broken his word. I ought to have placed a guard over him.'

"He then mounted to the belvidere, and on reaching it found a trap-door yawning wide open in the floor of the little turret.

"On looking into this aperture the funnel of a chimney could be perceived, which evidently communicated with the fireplace in the great salon.

"Here, then, was the Seventh Chimney. The work was done, but where was the marquis?

"'The devil must have flown away with him, sire,' remarked the intendant.

"Philip was of the same opinion, for he had learnt from the mysterious scroll that the marquis had bartered his soul to the Evil One. When the seventh chimney was completed, Satan could claim fulfilment of the compact.

"Possibly this was so, for the marquis was never heard of more, though some of his household affirmed that he had again fallen into the hands of the Holy Inquisition, and was burnt at an Auto da Fé. Let us hope the latter supposition was correct, since in that case his soul may have been saved.

"From the day of his disappearance, till now, Xavalquinto's mansion has been known as the House of Seven Chimneys."

The story was listened to with great apparent interest, especially by Charles, but the royal narrator did not give time for any remarks upon it, for at its conclusion he arose and returned to the house.

Passing through an open window looking upon the terrace, his majesty entered an ante-chamber communicating with the ball-room. Here were assembled the Earl of Bristol and several of his most distinguished guests.

After the king had taken his seat upon a fauteuil, he glanced at the group around him, and, perceiving De Cea, signed to him to approach.

"Where have you been, my lord?" he inquired. "You were not at the palace last night."

"No, sire, I was at the Escorial, assisting at a marriage."

"Indeed! Who has been married?" demanded Philip.

"The happy pair are in this room, sire," replied De Cea. "If you will cast your eyes round, you will at once detect them."

"The only persons I behold answering to such a description are Sir Richard Graham and Doña Casilda," said the king. "But surely they cannot be married?"

"The ceremony was performed last night, sire."

"But, I trust, with the consent of the Conde de Saldana?" said Philip.

"With his full consent and approval, sire. Don Christobal liberated the conde from his promise, so that the only obstacle to the union was removed."

"Since that is so, all is well," replied Philip. "Let them approach."

And as Sir Richard Graham and his blushing bride came forward and made their obeisances, his majesty graciously offered them his congratulations.

"I hope you are not going to deprive us of one of the brightest ornaments of our court, Sir Richard?" said Philip, smiling.

"I must return to England with the prince, sire," returned Graham. "And I cannot leave my wife behind me."

"I wish I could induce Don Ricardo to remain in Madrid, sire," remarked Casilda; "but, as he will go, I must accompany him."

"Nay, you are bound to do that," said the king. "But I hope you will bring him back soon. Has your highness been in the secret of this match?" he added, turning to Charles.

"I knew that Sir Richard was enamoured of the lady, sire," replied the prince. "But I scarcely expected the

affair would terminate so happily. You are a fortunate man, Dick," he added to Graham.

"Your highness will say so when you learn what a prodigious dowry his bride has brought him," said De Cea.

"Well, Sir Richard," said the king, "I must again congratulate you upon the prize you have won. Others of your countrymen would do well to follow your example. And now, my lord, we must bid you good night," he added to the Earl of Bristol. "We thank you heartily for your entertainment."

Philip and the royal party then took their departure, and Charles soon afterwards quitted the fête. While crossing the entrance-hall, accompanied by Buckingham, he encountered Olivarez, who attended him to his coach.

Before entering the carriage, Buckingham turned to Olivarez, and said haughtily :

"I bid your excellency farewell. I shall ever remain the faithful servant of the King of Spain, of her majesty the queen, and of the Lady Infanta, and will render them all the good offices in my power. But to your excellency I make no professions of friendship. You have so systematically opposed me, and have striven so anxiously to thwart my purposes, that I cannot but regard you as an enemy."

"You regard me rightly, my lord," rejoined Olivarez. "I am your enemy, my lord—your implacable enemy."

And he turned upon his heel.

VI.

THE FAREWELL AT THE FRESNADA.

NEXT morning Charles quitted Madrid, never to return thither.

He was attended by all the English nobles and gentlemen forming his suite, and was accompanied as far as the Escorial by the king, the whole of the royal family, and the principal grandees of the court.

The cortége was preceded by a guard of archers, under the command of Don Melchior del Alcazar, and comprised a long train of carriages and horse-litters, with a troop of seven hundred well-mounted and superbly arrayed horsemen.

At the Escorial Charles remained for two days, where he was entertained with regal hospitality by Philip, and shown all the wonders of the mighty convent-palace.

On the third day, the whole party proceeded, at an early hour, to the Fresnada, a royal hunting-seat, situated in a wood on the side of the Guadarrama, about a league from the Escorial. In this wood a stag was chased and killed, after which a banquet was spread beneath the trees.

The parting hour had now arrived. Charles tenderly embraced the king; took leave of the queen and the two princes; and bade a last adieu to the Infanta.

A last adieu, we say, for he never beheld her more.

A little marble column reared in the wood marks the spot where this parting occurred.

Shortly after the farewell at the Fresnada, two troops might be seen moving in opposite directions; one descending towards the Escorial, the other climbing the rugged sides of the Guadarrama.

Charles found the fleet awaiting him at Santander. On embarking on the *Prince Royal*, he observed to the

Earl of Rutland, who received him, and congratulated him on his safe arrival, "It was great weakness and folly in Olivarez to let me go so easily, after treating me so badly."

Buckingham took care that the Spanish Match should be broken off, but he quickly made up another, and fulfilled his promise by finding Charles a consort in Henriette Marie.

Would the prince have been happier if he had wedded the Infanta?

THE END.

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